

# Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF  
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1994



# BANDWAGON

## The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

Vol. 38, No. 6

FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor      Stuart Thayer, Copy Editor  
Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1994

BANDWAGON, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005 4968), is published bi-monthly. Second class postage paid at Columbus, OH. Editorial, advertising and circulation office is located at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221. Phone (614) 294-5361. Advertising rates are: Full page \$95.00, half page \$55.00, quarter page \$35.00. Minimum ad is \$20.00. The BANDWAGON is produced using a Macintosh IIcx computer, DesignStudio and TypeStyler software.

Bandwagon subscription rates, \$19.00 to members and non-members in the United States, \$24.00 per year outside the United States. Single copies \$3.00 plus \$2.00 postage. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BANDWAGON, 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212.

Offices of the Circus Historical Society are located at 3477 Vienna Ct., Westerville, OH 43081.

CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY-Fred Dahlinger, Jr., President, 451 Roblee Rd., Baraboo, WI 53913; Richard J. Reynolds III, Vice President, 1186 Warrenhall La. NE, Atlanta, GA 30319; Dale C. Haynes, Secretary-Treasurer, 3477 Vienna Ct., Westerville, OH 43081.

DIRECTORS: Div. 1-Fred D. Pfening, Jr., 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221 (Ohio-Mich.-Ind.); Div. 2-Copeland MacAllister, 30 Salem End Rd., #2A, Framingham, MA 01701 (N.H.-Maine-Vt.-Mass.-Ct.-Del.-R.I.); Div. 3-William L. Rhodes, 2528 Taylorsville Rd., Louisville, KY 40205 (N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.-Md.-D.C.-Va.-W. Va.-Ky.); Div. 4-Joseph T. Bradbury, 1453 Ashwoody Ct., N.E., Atlanta, GA 30319 (N.C.-S.C.-Ga.-Ala.-Fla.-Miss.-Tenn.-Ark.-La.); Div. 5-Guy J. Fiorenza, P. O. Box 12, Rockford, IL 61105 (Wis.-Ill.-Minn.-Iowa-Mo.); Div. 6-Orin C. King, 5225 SW 20 Terrace #302, Topeka, KS 66604 (N.D.-S.D.-Kan.-Neb.-Okla.-Tex.); Div. 7-Joseph S. Rettinger, P.O. Box 20371, Phoenix, AZ 85036 (Col.-Mont.-Ida.-Wyo.-N M-Utah-Nev.-Ariz.); Div. 8-Michael D. Sporrer, 14537 N. E. 40th St. #H202, Bellevue, WA 98007 (Wa.-Ore.-Ca.-Hawaii); Div. 9-Dr. Gordon D. Brown, 7459 Saskatchewan Dr., Edmonton, Alb., Can. T6G 2A5 (All countries outside the United States.)

### THIS MONTH'S COVER

The Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus poster on our cover was used in 1907. It was printed by the Donaldson Lithographing Co. of Newport, Kentucky. The majority of Forepaugh-Sells bills were printed by the Strobridge Co. The poster is from the Howard Tibbals collection.

The Four Arizonas performed juggling and contortion acts. They appeared with the show only one season.

### NEW MEMBERS

Jean Warner	3917
P. O. Box 431	
Myrtle Beach, SC 29578-0431	
Doug A. Mishler	3918
859 Chuckanut Shore Rd.	
Bellingham, WA 98226	
Mark E. Anthony	3919
14962 Weir Plaza	
Omaha, NE 68137	
Elmer Barg	3920
2163 Ringle Rd.	
Vassar, MI 48768	
Merle D. Sauve	3921
P. O. Box 25517	
Sarasota, FL 34272-2517	

Paul R. Sauve  
P. O. Box 25517  
Sarasota, FL 34272-2517

Classic Books  
107 Crosswoods Shopping Plaza  
Sarasota, FL 34239

### 1994 SEASON'S REVIEW

Please send any information you may have for the 1994 season review. It will be published in the January-February 1995 *Bandwagon*. Material on small and indoor circuses is especially needed.

Send information, photos and illustrations to Fred D. Pfening III, 2240 Tewksbury Road, Columbus, Ohio 43221

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION as required by 39 U. S. C 3685. BANDWAGON is published every two months at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221.

The names and addresses of the publisher, editor and managing editor are: Publisher and Editor, Fred D. Pfening, Jr., 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221; Managing Editor, Fred D Pfening III, 2240 Tewksbury Rd., Columbus, OH 43221.

The owner is the Circus Historical Society, 3477 Vienna Ct., Westerville, OH 43081. Known bond holders, mortgagors and other security holders owning 1 percent or more of the total bond: none.

The average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months is: (A) Total number of copies printed, 1,700; (B) Paid circulation (1) through sales dealers, carriers, street vendors and counter sales: none. (2) mail subscriptions: 1350; (C) total paid subscriptions: 1350; (D) free distribution by mail, carriers,

or other means, samples, complementary and other free copies: 6; (E) Total distribution: 1356; (F) copies not distributed: 344; (1) office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 344; (2) returned from news agents: none; (G) Total: 1,700.

Actual number of copies of a single issue nearest to filing date is: (A) Total number of copies printed: 1,700, (B) Paid circulation: (1) through dealers carriers, street vendors and counter sales: none; (B) paid circulation: 1,278 (C) total mail subscriptions: 1,278; (D) free distribution by mail carriers, or any other means, samples, complementary and other free copies: 6; (E) total distribution: 1,284; (F) copies not distributed: (1) office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 416; (2) returns from news agents: none; (G) total: 1,700.

I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Publisher. (9-24-94)



Do you have our current "N" catalog?

If not you are missing out.

We carry the best in

"HO" and "O"

Circus Kits, Books, Posters and collectibles.

We've got something for everybody.

Send \$4.00 to:

STAR CIRCUS SUPPLIES  
3037 Grass Valley Hwy.  
Auburn, CA 95602

### AVAILABLE BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

1966-Jan.-Feb.  
1967-July-Aug., Nov.-Dec.  
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1971-All but May-June.  
1972-All available.  
1973-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.  
1974-All but Mar.-Ap.; May-June.  
1975-All available.  
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.  
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.  
1978-All available.  
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1980-1986-All available.  
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1988-1994-All available.

Price is \$3.00 each. Add \$2.00 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

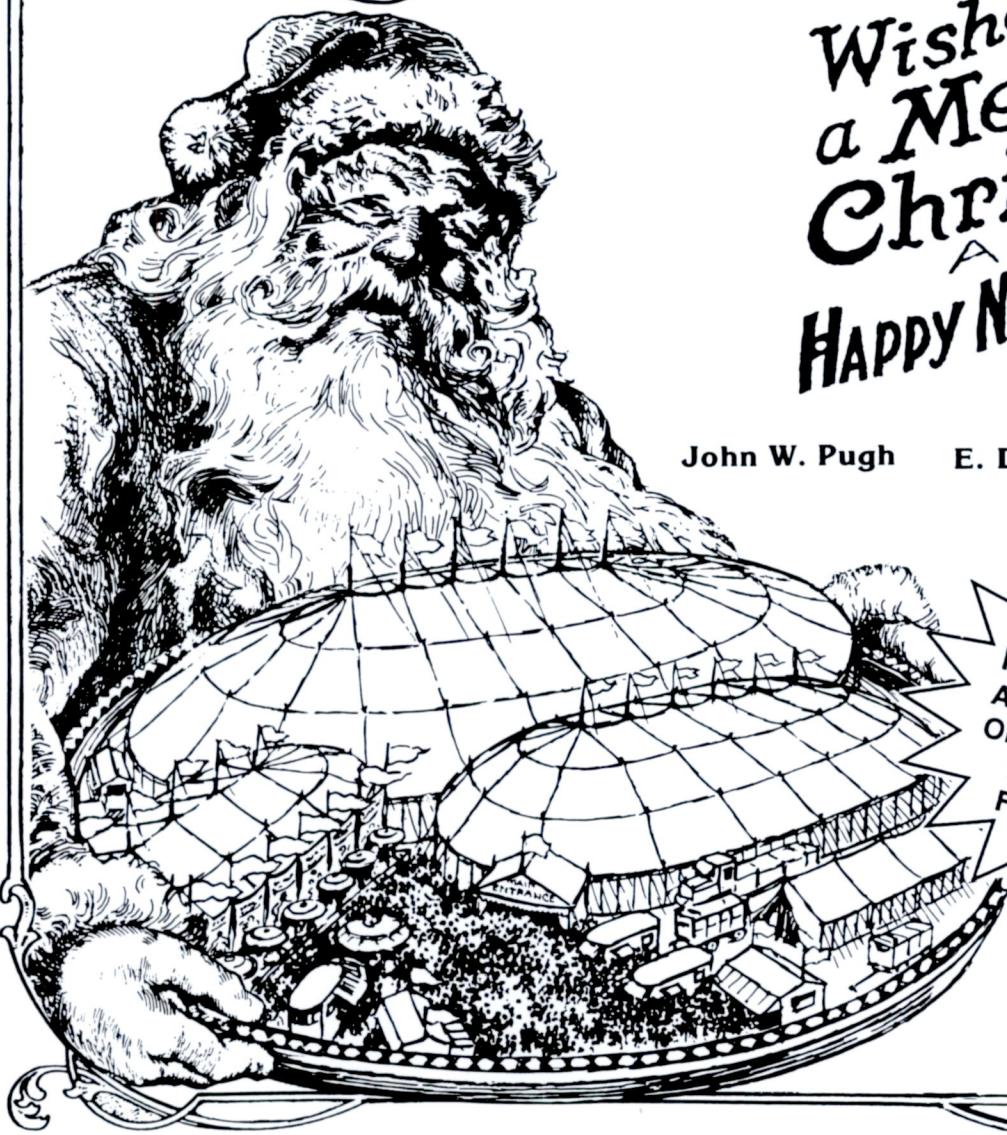
BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES  
2515 DORSET RD.  
COLUMBUS, OH 43221

# CLYDE BEATTY COLE BROS.

Wishes You  
a Merry  
Christmas  
AND  
Happy NEW YEAR

John W. Pugh      E. Douglas Holwadel

SEE US ON  
NBC, JAN. 1ST  
AS PART OF THE  
ORANGE - BOWL  
HALF - TIME  
FESTIVITIES!



**F**or sixty-five years (1927-1992) Sarasota County, Florida was the winter home of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show On Earth. The first thirty-three years (1927-1960) were logged at Ringling's famous facilities on the eastern side of the City of Sarasota. It is fair to say that they were the largest, most elaborate, best known, and most often visited circus winter quarters the world has ever known. Ringling and Sarasota (the city) became so closely associated with one another in much of public perception, a synonymity which persists to this day, that many are surprised to realize that the big circus spent almost as long, thirty-two years (1960-1992), at another Sarasota County location, the quaint City of Venice to the south.<sup>1</sup> Even less widely known is the fact that the city also served as winter home for circuses other than Ringling.

Throughout the entire time that Venice was its base, Ringling-Barnum was always a railroad circus. The same cannot be said for the years at its quarters in the City of Sarasota as, during its last four years there, it went forth as a predominately over-the-road truck show.

# VENICE, FLORIDA AND THE CIRCUS

## PART ONE

By Richard J. Reynolds, III

Those were the Ringling editions of 1957, '58, '59, and '60 (1st half), the nadir following the final folding of its big top in 1956. In due course, after it had relocated

The Ringling-Barnum winter quarters at Venice airport (looking west) in 1976 or 1977 after the two units had gone on the road. Note Ursula Bottcher's German polar bear wagons to right of big cage. The Tamiami Trail (U. S. 41) is at bottom, with the Gulf of Mexico in distance. James Edgar's Sparks Circus was at this site in the winter of 1946-47 using a hanger on the air field apron (near upper left) and pitching tents on a then empty field where the Ringling buildings, shown here, were later built. Author's collection.

in 1960, the Greatest Show On Earth would grow to proportions not dreamed of during what, in the view of many, were the dark days of its depression in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This is the story of the place of its renaissance, the place where three of the last four new American railroad circuses were framed. It is the story of Venice, Florida as a circus city.

### VENICE, FLORIDA

The Barnum circus had been entertaining the American public for seventeen years and the neophyte Ringlings for four, when the name "Venice" became an official post office address for a tiny unincorporated community of fishermen, farmers, and sugar cane and citrus growers around and near Dona and Roberts Bays on Florida's southwestern coast some fifty miles below Tampa Bay on the Gulf of Mexico. The year was 1888.<sup>2</sup> Credit for naming the place "Venice" has been claimed by two pioneer families in the area, the Currys and the Higels. In the case of the latter, its Florida progenitor, Frank Higel, who arrived there in 1882, is said to have selected the name because the climate and network of bays, streams,



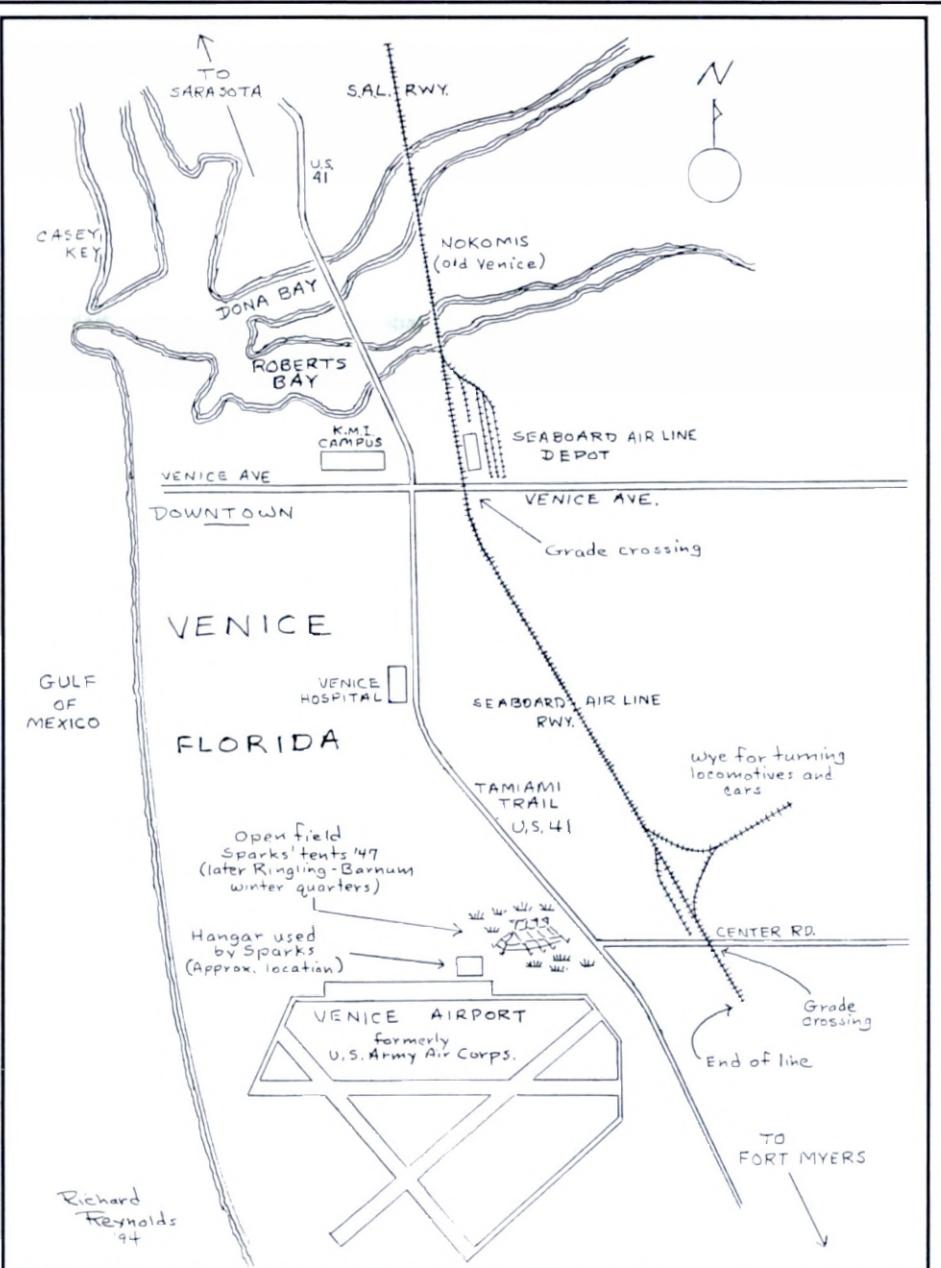
and inlets reminded him of the famous Italian city that he had visited during his early years.<sup>3</sup>

The first post office named Venice, however, was not located where the present city now stands but slightly north thereof. It was across Roberts Bay on land that many years later, in 1917, would be named "Nokomis" after the grandmother of Longfellow's Hiawatha.<sup>4</sup> And, as we will later see, the Ringling show once refurbished some railroad cars on a siding located there.

In 1910 the community known as Venice had a population of only 173. Yet, that year the Seaboard Air Line Railway announced that it would build down to Venice a 16.5 mile extension of its line that then ended in Sarasota. (The latter had been served by Seaboard from the Tampa area since March, 1903).<sup>5</sup> Given the paltry population of the Venice community, the rail extension hardly seemed economically justified. But, that did not take into account the influence of Mrs. Potter Palmer. She was the socialite widow of one of Chicago's wealthiest men who, among many other achievements, had built in the Windy City a world famous hotel, the Palmer House.

As a result of a visit to the Sarasota-Venice area in 1910, Mrs. Palmer agreed to buy 84,000 acres in Manatee County (which then included all of later Sarasota County) on condition that the Seaboard Railway extend its tracks south to a place of her choice in the Venice area where part of her proposed acreage lay. The railroad agreed, and the line was opened to traffic in 1912. However, when the tracks were laid they did not end at the place where the Venice post office was then located (present day Nokomis). Instead, they went on south a short distance past Roberts Bay, terminating where specified by Mrs. Palmer amidst her property. And, that is where the first depot was built. The Chicago socialite liked the name "Venice" and, with no little amount of resentment on the part of the folks north of Roberts Bay, caused both the name and the post office to be moved south to the place where the tracks ended in what is now the City of Venice. Back then, however, it was little more than sandy soil, palmettos, pine trees, and tangled underbrush extending out to the beach. Mrs. Palmer had wanted to develop that location but never did; she died in 1918 at her winter home near Osprey on Little Sarasota Bay.<sup>6</sup>

The next major player on the scene was a prominent and wealthy New York physician, Dr. Fred H. Albee, an orthopedist. During a February, 1916 trip to the area he purchased from Mrs. Palmer the land that would become Venice and its beachfront.<sup>7</sup> In 1921, the Florida legislature



Map of Venice, Florida, circa 1947.  
Sketched by the author in 1994.

broke off the southern part of Manatee County to form the new Sarasota County which included Venice and the City of Sarasota, the latter becoming the new county seat.<sup>8</sup> The great Florida land boom had begun, and Dr. Albee had plans for his Venice area holdings. He visualized a preplanned, ideal model city, and employed John Nolen, a noted city planner of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to design it.<sup>9</sup>

Most Florida oceanfront beaches lie on barrier islands separated from the mainland by bays, lagoons, and marshes which must be bridged or filled to reach the sea. Not so Dr. Albee's Venice. It is a

Florida rarity with the surf crashing right on the mainland. With the boom underway, Dr. Albee had numerous offers. One from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers could not be refused, and in September, 1925 he sold out to the train drivers.<sup>10</sup> Theirs was one of the oldest (1863), wealthiest, and most respected of the trade unions, and they were attracted by the prospect of huge profits to be made from the skyrocketing prices of Florida land. Through their BLE Realty Corporation (the initials standing for their union's name), they swiftly set about implementing the Nolen plan for a model Venice. Not only was it to have an ideal residential city, but the eventual total of 77,000 acres was to have an industrial zone around the railroad and, running

east from there all the way to the Myakka River, a network of fertile farms and dairies.<sup>11</sup>

On February 26, 1926 the sale of lots and tracts was kicked off by a well advertised and elaborate promotional event staged by BLE Realty. Thousands attended, and there was a big barbecue on the Venice beach. It has been written that John Ringling, circus mogul and mega-developer from just up the road in Sarasota, contributed to the festive occasion by having Merle Evans and his circus band go to Venice to entertain the crowd.<sup>12</sup> Assuming that to be correct, it marked the Ringling show's first involvement with Venice. Thirty-four years later, the same Merle Evans played his famous coronet in Venice, this time at track-side as part of the ceremony welcoming the circus to its new winter home.<sup>13</sup>

Several years before BLE began selling lots, automobile travel to Venice had been markedly improved via a paved highway linking it with Sarasota and Tampa to the north. This road would be incorporated into the famous Tamiami Trail (U. S. Highway 41), finally completed in 1928, that goes down Florida's west coast from Tampa to Naples and then through the Everglades to Miami.<sup>14</sup>

To conform to the Nolen plan, BLE had to pay to have the railroad tracks moved east a quarter mile to the place where they lay when later used by the circuses. The Brotherhood even went so far as to build a new depot for Seaboard. It was completed in 1927, and the first train departed the new station on Sunday evening, March 27th of that year. In line with Nolen's requirement that all houses and buildings be constructed in the Italian Renaissance/Mediterranean style, the new depot had a stucco exterior, red terra cotta tile roof and an ornamental tower also topped with the tile. Located on the main east-west thoroughfare of Venice Ave., it was one of the prettiest depots anywhere in Florida and served the city until passenger service ended in 1971.<sup>15</sup> It still stands, albeit shamefully neglected and deteriorated.

On May 4, 1927, eight months before Ringling-Barnum first landed in its new quarters just up the road in Sarasota, Venice finally became an incorporated municipality. By the end of that year it could boast of a population of 4,000 with three hotels. Then the balloon burst.<sup>16</sup>

The Florida real estate crash had begun about a year earlier in the Miami area and by the end of '27 gripped Venice too. BLE Realty was finished, and its Venice project was finally shut down forever in April, 1929. H. N. "Bud" Wimmers, a former BLE assistant treasurer, was appointed receiver to conclude its affairs.<sup>17</sup>

(We will run into him later as he played a key role in moving Ringling-Barnum to Venice.) The stock market panic came just six months after BLE's demise. The Great Depression was at hand, and Venice would become a near ghost town: a scattering of buildings, many incomplete or unoccupied, facing onto a mixture of paved and unfinished streets, some of them sprouting weeds. By 1930 the city's population, per the U. S. Census, had fallen to a mere 309!<sup>18</sup>

#### HELP ARRIVES

Kentucky Military Institute (KMI) was a private, all male military prep or high school located at Lyndon on the eastern side of Louisville. Founded in 1845, it was the oldest school of its type in America. In 1906 it had opened a satellite winter campus at Eau Gallie on the Indian River of Florida's east coast but closed it in 1923. A new headmaster, Col. Charles B. Richmond, took over in 1925 and wanted to reestablish KMI in the Sunshine State. In 1931 two of Venice's new but financially distressed hotels, the San Marco and the Venice, were found by Col. Richmond to be ideally suited. They were purchased, and in January, 1932 the KMI cadets arrived for their first winter session.

With a second campus in Venice, KMI's school year went thusly: September to Christmas holidays at the Lyndon, Kentucky campus, January to Easter in Venice, and April and May back in Kentucky. The winter session gave Venice a much needed economic boost. Not only were the students and faculty there, but many of the cadets were from wealthy families

The Sparks Circus published this call advertisement in the February 8, 1947 *Billboard*. Author's collection.

**CALL** **CALL**

**SPARKS CIRCUS**  
A Supreme Achievement in Circus Amusement

ALL PEOPLE CONTRACTED ANSWER THIS  
CALL AND REPORT TO QUARTERS AT VENICE, FLA.,  
ARMY AIR BASE BY

**TUESDAY, FEB. 25**

★ ★ ★ 1947 STAFF—1947 ★ ★ ★

JAMES EDGAR, Manager  
MARSHALL L. GREEN, General Agent  
DENNY HELMS, General Superintendent  
ARNOLD MALEY, Treasurer  
P. A. McCRAITH, Trainmaster  
JOHN STALEY, Steward  
WARD NATH, Superintendent Lights  
HOWARD MENZ, Superintendent Props

CAN PLACE GIRLS FOR BALLET  
ONE MORE FEATURE ACT

Workingmen in all departments report to quarters NOW!

ADDRESS JAMES EDGAR, Mgr.

**SPARKS** RAILROAD **CIRCUS**  
ARMY AIR BASE VENICE, FLORIDA

who would come down to visit them and enjoy a respite from cold weather.<sup>19</sup>

KMI offered Venetians the best pageantry they could see until the Ringling circus arrived in 1960. Each January, when the KMI special train arrived at the Venice depot, the cadets would form up and march off west along Venice Avenue to their campus several blocks away. And, the corps was famous for its popular formal military parades, held on alternate Sunday afternoons, with the young men smartly marching in their dress uniforms.<sup>20</sup> While in Venice, the cadets participated in local and interscholastic events. In the winter of 1947, for example, they provided the honor guard for the Sara De Sota pageant's king and queen who, that year, were Dr. William Northen Jr. and the lovely and vivacious Mabel Ringling.<sup>21</sup> Sportswise, KMI competed with local high schools in basketball, track, and baseball;<sup>22</sup> your writer saw its baseball team play a game with Manatee County High in Bradenton on March 17, 1953.

KMI provided good business for the railroads. The student body (200 in 1932 but up to 334 by 1965)<sup>23</sup> and many of the faculty traveled between Louisville and Venice on special trains. The number of cars varied over the years; in January, 1951, for example, the KMI special out of Louisville consisted of 11 cars: 8 coaches, 2 diners, and a baggage car.<sup>24</sup> Regular passenger trains to and from Venice were nowhere near that. In fact, the KMI trains were the longest of that type in and out of Venice save those of the circuses that wintered there and possibly some World War II troop trains carrying men headed to and from the Venice Army Air Base.

In the beginning, the cadets' trains operated to Venice via Louisville & Nashville to Montgomery, Alabama, Atlantic Coast Line (ACL) to Tampa, and Seaboard to Venice. The ACL took the KMI specials over its Perry, Florida line, opened in 1928. It provided a straight shot down the west coast of Florida and was called the "Perry Cut Off" because it cut off rail mileage in reaching that part of the state. It went from Thomasville in southwestern Georgia directly down to Monticello and Perry Florida and thence into Tampa. This route allowed ACL to avoid the circuitous and congested Jacksonville gateway it had previously used on traffic moving between Florida's west coast and mid-west America. This gave the ACL a leg up on competing railroads which had no similar short cut.<sup>25</sup> Depending upon origin or destination outside Florida, the Ringling trains occasionally used the Perry Cut-Off in moving to or from Sarasota quarters via the ACL.<sup>26</sup> We must figure that the Tampa based Royal American carnival some-

times did so too. After passenger service was discontinued on the "cut off" line in 1957, the KMI trains traveled more circuitously via Jacksonville.<sup>27</sup>

KMI fell on hard times during the late 1960s, a victim of the anti-war, anti-military, and anti-establishment counterculture then affecting those of prep school age. Its last Venice winter session was that of 1970. In 1971 it dropped its military training, admitted girls, and became the coeducational Kentucky Academy. Deprived of its heritage and tradition it failed. The school closed forever with its 128th and final commencement on May 27, 1973.<sup>28</sup> Is there a lesson in this for South Carolina's Citadel and Virginia's Military Institute?

In addition to KMI, Venice got much needed economic help in the early 1930s from the aforementioned Dr. Fred Albee. Much of the Locomotive Engineers' real estate came back to him upon the failure of BLE Realty. Additionally, the doctor had considerable Venice property that he had never sold. He was still a Venice mover and shaker. Having for some time desired to open a first class hospital in Venice, Dr. Albee, in 1933, took another of the new but defunct hotels, the Parkview, and converted it into the Florida Medical Center. It was successful from the start and drew patients from all across the nation and foreign countries as well.<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Albee's medical center was taken over by the Army Air Force in 1942. He died three years later. However, his work had put Venice on the medical map, a tradition carried on today through the much respected 324 bed Venice Hospital.<sup>30</sup> It was there that Ringling-Barnum show owner Irvin Feld died on September 6, 1984 following a cerebral hemorrhage while in Venice for the opening of his Clown College.<sup>31</sup> He was the first Ringling show owner to die in one of its active winter quarters towns since Mrs. Charles (Edith Conway) Ringling passed away in Sarasota on September 23, 1953.<sup>32</sup>

Before leaving depression era Venice, we should point out that it was the place where one of the twentieth century's great religious ministries had its humble beginning. The year was 1938, and the location was a storefront church. A group of some 100 had assembled to hear a young divinity student preach. He was Billy Graham, and it was on that occasion that he issued his first full fledged invitation or altar call. Though only 32 of the congregates came forward, he had laid the cornerstone upon which his worldwide evangelical crusade would be based. And, it happened in Venice!<sup>33</sup>

Venice's biggest boost toward economic recovery came toward the end

of 1941 when construction began for an Army Air Corps training base.<sup>34</sup> And, that is where, after World War II, circus winter quarters would be established. The air base was installed just south of the city with its western and eastern boundaries being, respectively, the Gulf of Mexico and the Tamiami Trail (U.S. 41). Center Road intersected the Trail at the air base and ran due east from there some six miles to the Myakka River. Back then, and until comparatively recently, it was nothing but a sandy, dirt road running through pine and palmetto barrens. Significant for this story, about a half mile east of the air base Center Road crossed the Seaboard Air Line Railway at grade level near the southern end of its Venice track. (The depot was two miles north at the Venice Ave crossing). Center Road would be the main place where circuses would later load or unload leaving or returning to quarters.

Built at a cost of three million and occupying 1,236 acres, the Venice Air Base trained bomber pilots. At its peak it housed 20,000 men, a big shot in the arm for any local economy let alone a place as small as Venice. After all, its 1940 population stood at only 507!<sup>35</sup> When the war ended the base became surplus and, like billions of dollars of ex-military property around the nation, headed for disposition via the War Assets Administration, much of it at bargain prices.

The city of Venice moved swiftly to acquire the base. The deal was made in May, 1946 and finalized on July 8, 1948 when the War Assets Administrator delivered the deed. In the meantime the city

James Edgar, owner of the 1948 Sparks Circus. David Reddy collection.



operated the facility under an interim permit. In the final analysis, the base was more or less given to the city for a municipal airport.<sup>36</sup> However, there were strings attached.

The city's new airport had to be and remain under the supervision of the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) which became the Federal Aviation Agency in 1958 and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in 1967. Further, the city had to maintain and improve the runways, hangers, etc. and use revenues from operations for that purpose. Should a military emergency arise, the federal government reserved the right to reinstall the air base.<sup>37</sup> However, its runways were only 5,000 feet long apiece. Rising operational standards would make that length inadequate for the Air Force's jets that would soon be on the scene. Besides, larger and better equipped air bases were nearby, MacDill at Tampa and Homestead near Miami, both only minutes away by streaking jet. So, the government later waived the military reversion clause.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, it was the War Assets Administration that, during the winter of 1946-47, sold Ringling-Barnum the railroad cars that would comprise its train when it arrived in Venice to take up residence at winter quarters which had also been made available via the same War Assets Administration.

#### JAMES EDGAR

The City of Venice now had a new airport, and with it came expenditures for maintenance. Revenues were needed and in larger amounts than could be generated simply from takeoff and landing fees for small private airplanes. Rental of hangars and other buildings were an obvious answer. Enter James Edgar. It was he who would put Venice on the circus map. For that reason we will elaborate on him and his brief but significant career as a showman.

James Edgar II was born in 1909 to an immensely wealthy and patrician family in Detroit, Michigan. His paternal grandmother, Mrs. James Edgar Sr., nee Mary Goodloe, was the granddaughter of William Owsley, the 1844-48 Governor of Kentucky. She married James Edgar Sr. in Lexington at the home of her father, Judge William Clinton Goodloe, and then moved with her husband to Detroit. In time she became one of the grande dames of Detroit society, maintaining homes in both that city and its posh suburb, Grosse Pointe.<sup>39</sup>

Our subject's paternal great grandfather, his grandfather, James Edgar Sr., and his father, Brigadier General C. Goodloe Edgar, had all been associated with W. H. Edgar & Son, a Detroit sugar brokerage business, and an affil-

ated warehousing operation, Edgar's Sugar House, Inc. These operations had made millions for the family. By the mid-1930s young James Edgar II was also active in the business and was referred to as the heir to part of the Detroit sugar fortune.<sup>40</sup>

One of Detroit's glittering social events of 1934 was young Edgar's lavish wedding to Katherine Crawford, a musical comedy and screen actress. After their nuptials the couple settled in his home on Lake Shore Drive in the upscale community of Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan.<sup>41</sup>

James and Katherine Edgar's matrimony was short lived, blown apart by a scandal of the tabloid type in which Edgar sued a young Pennsylvania millionaire, Lewis E. Mallory, III, for alienating his wife Katherine's affections. The gravamen of the legal action was Mallory's alleged "misconduct" during March, 1936 in a room at the Deauville Hotel on Miami Beach. The matter dragged on until 1939 when settled through a reported payment of \$5,000 to Edgar. Meanwhile, in June, 1936, Katherine Edgar had sued for and obtained a divorce from husband James. Given the millionaire playboy/glamorous actress backdrop of these events, the scandal generated nationwide press prattle for public titillation.<sup>42</sup> Eventually, after the furor had subsided, James Edgar married again, this time for good to Ann White. She was a circus performer who, with her family, had been on a number of shows.

Essentially, James Edgar was a circus fan from a wealthy family who was impelled to have a go as a show owner. He was not the first of that background to do so. We are reminded of two precedents from the early 1890s: young and wealthy but frail Albert M. Wetter of Massillon,

Sparks stock car No. 37, leased from Ringling-Barnum for the 1947 tour. Pfening Archives.

James Edgar, in hat, with left to right, Mable Ringling, her Mother Mrs. Aubrey Haley and James A. Haley, president of Ringling-Barnum at Sparks evening performance in Sarasota on March 6, 1947. Photo from March 29, 1947 *Billboard*.

Ohio who put out a circus using his name in 1893-94<sup>43</sup> and W. B. (William Burton) Reynolds who took a five year flyer under his moniker in 1892-96.<sup>44</sup> A more recent example was our own *Bandwagon* editor, Fred D. Pfening Jr., who partially stepped aside from his Columbus, Ohio family business to put out for one season only (1955) The Great Fred J. Mack Circus.<sup>45</sup>

And now to the circus biz of James Edgar.

From all that appears, Edgar's impresarial career began in 1940 when he played fairs in the U.S.A. and Canada with a show he called "Royal Ice Palace Review." Paul Ringling, son of Richard and Aubrey and grandson of Alf T., knew Edgar well. Ringling recalled that in 1940, when he was working on the white ticket wagon of his family's show, he managed to catch Edgar's ice show out on the road and that there were problems with the skating surface. The ice show was out only that one season. In January, 1941 Edgar went into the Army and was discharged in November, 1944 after serving eighteen months in Europe, attaining the rank of major, and serving in the Italian campaign under General Mark Clark.<sup>46</sup>

Around the end of the war Edgar, his wife Ann, and their small son established a home in Sarasota.<sup>47</sup> In January, 1946 Ed-

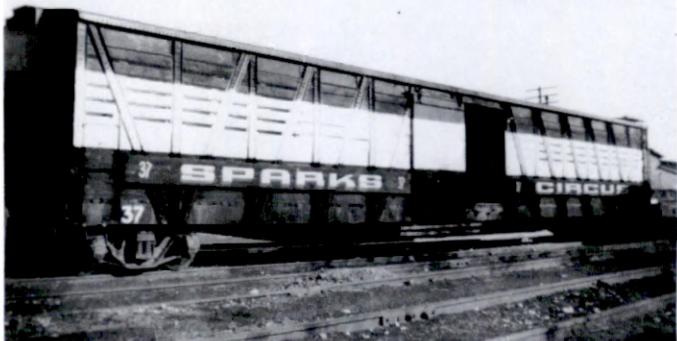
gar announced that he would have another go with a traveling, under canvas ice show then being framed in Sarasota. This one would be called "Ice Gayety." However, technical problems arose right away. The refrigeration units did not work properly, and the plates for the portable rink were said to be too heavy to move, at least

those were the reasons given; and, using the trucks, canvas, and other paraphernalia already assembled, Edgar converted his spawning 1946 outfit into a circus to be launched from Sarasota quarters.<sup>48</sup>

It has been written that Ralph J. Clawson, a veteran circus man, advisor to Edgar, and soon to be his general manager, induced him to convert the aborning ice outfit into a circus.<sup>49</sup> However, as we shall see momentarily, Edgar's circus plans were germinating long before that.

The name Edgar used for his new 1946 circus was certainly auspicious, for he persuaded the Ringling organization to lease from its stable of venerable old show titles that of the Sparks Circus which had not been on the road for 15 years (since 1931). The significance of this cannot be overlooked as it is the only instance since World War II of Ringling-Barnum's allowing a showman to borrow one of its titles for a competing circus. We do not know how many times the Ringling organization has been approached by other showmen with that objective as it would involve title rental payments in addition to other expenses.<sup>50</sup> And, as historian Fred Dahlinger, Jr. has pointed out (in litt., September 14, 1994), most new shows have begun on shoestrings, woefully undercapitalized, and just able to make it out of the barn, let alone taking on the added burden of paying title royalties, no matter how nominal. Regardless

Sparks' 1947 elephants. Five Asian females on load from Ringling-Barnum. Pfening Archives.





Aerial view of Sparks Circus on lot at the opening stand in Fort Myers, Florida on March 4, 1947. Pfening Archives.

of all that, however, Edgar's deal with the Big One is historically noteworthy and made possible because he was an insider.

As a young man and circus fan, Edgar had become a friend of the family of Aubrey Ringling (later Haley). Her son, Paul Ringling, recalled that in the early 1930s Edgar visited the Ringling ranch in Montana and that he was a likable chap, very popular with the Ringling family to whom he was known as "Jamie."<sup>51</sup>

Ringling-Barnum's horrible big top fire (169 deaths and some 500 more injured) had occurred in Hartford, Connecticut in July, 1944<sup>52</sup> some four months before Edgar was discharged from the Army. In April, 1945 Ringling director and first vice-president James A. Haley went to prison in Connecticut to commence serving an eight month sentence as the result of his pleading nolo contendere to charges of involuntary manslaughter for the deaths from the Hartford fire.<sup>53</sup> His wife Aubrey (formerly Aubrey Ringling), also a circus director, vice-president and owner of almost one third of the show's stock, was left to look after her family's interest in the show. That was a time of much tension and wrangling among Ringling officers and directors.

Aubrey Haley's daughter, Mable Ringling, told your writer that her mother needed friendly support on the board of directors. So, Mrs. Haley turned to her family friend, Jamie Edgar, to fill her husband's position on the board.<sup>54</sup> We must figure that in this Edgar met with the approval of vice president Mrs. Charles (Edith Conway) Ringling who was notably involved, nay outspoken, in protecting the interests of her part of the clan. She owned another near third of the show's stock and had an agreement with

Aubrey Haley to vote their combined majority the same way.<sup>55</sup>

Per the usual practice, the annual Ringling-Barnum stockholders' and directors' meeting for 1945 was held at the show's New York office, 10 Rockefeller Plaza, while four blocks away the circus itself was encamped at Madison Square Garden for its season opener. At the meeting, held that year on April 18th, James Haley, who had just been incarcerated, was removed from the board of directors and James Edgar was elected to take his place.<sup>56</sup> Thus it was that the heir to the Detroit sugar fortune, a virtual unknown in circus circles, came to hold one of the most exalted positions in the show world, albeit for less than a year.

James Haley was released from prison

Damoo Dhotre on the 1946 Sparks truck circus. Pfening Archives.



on Christmas Eve, 1945 and jumped back into the Ringling management fray, replacing Robert Ringling as president at the annual meeting in April, 1946.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, James Edgar had left his position on the Ringling board, prepared to venture out on his own.

As early as mid-1945, while he was a big show director, Edgar had made his circus intentions known to Ringling management by inquiring as to the possibility of his using not only the Sparks title but that of Al G. Barnes as well. It seems passing strange, therefore, that his first move during the winter of 1945-46 was toward the framing of an ice show. Perhaps all along that was but a fall back position in case he was unable to strike a deal with the Ringling show, could not line up a competent staff of circus executives, and/or failed to enlist the additional financial backers to which we will refer momentarily.

The Ringling organization came through, and for 1946 Edgar leased not only its Sparks title but two of its elephants which comprised his '46 "herd."<sup>58</sup> With them came the necessary harnesses, tubs and blankets. Additionally, he got from Ringling a Cummins diesel light plant and switch board with all necessary accouterments, uniforms (band, ticket takers, ushers, prop, and menagerie men), and some wardrobe. The last named was no doubt used but still flashier than most shows had.

Most significantly, the big show loaned Edgar's 1946 Sparks circus its leopard-jaguar-puma act, presented by Damoo Dhotre, including a steel arena with all its props as well as the necessary animal cages and the chute to connect them with the big cage. For the act came thirteen animals: 7 spotted leopards, 2 black leopards, 2 pumas, and 2 of the only 3 black jaguars ever worked in an American ring as far as we know.<sup>59</sup> Those animals had been purchased by Ringling-Barnum from Alfred Court on November, 17, 1944.

Not since Germany's Carl Hagenbeck and England's Frank Bostock had there been an international entrepreneur-impresario of the big cage like Alfred Court. He had produced and directed the wild animal acts for Ringling-Barnum from 1940 through 1944 while retaining title to them. He appeared in them only rarely; mostly they were worked by his trainers, including Damoo Dhotre. After selling his animals to Ringling in November, 1944, he produced one more act for the big show, the novel ladies and leopards routine of 1945; and, after seeing it off to a successful opening in New York, he retired forever from show business. He was then 62.<sup>60</sup>

Not only was the leopard act the most

sophisticated of the former Court acts (in this observer's opinion), it was the only one of the Frenchman's former groups still working and thus the only one of that genre both owned by and readily available to the Ringling show.<sup>61</sup> As a result, the Greatest Show On Earth went sans the big cage in 1946 (the only time that has happened since 1937) while Edgar's Sparks had one of the best ones ever.<sup>62</sup>

From a legal standpoint, the entity organized by Edgar, and through which his 1946-47 circus operations were conducted, was The Florida Circus Corporation. "Sparks Circus" was merely the trade name by which it did business with, of course, the permission of Ringling-Barnum. Though Edgar was the principal owner, he held only the office of corporate secretary-treasurer at the outset. The president was one Marshall Johnson of Selma, Alabama who had a financial interest in it, thereby fulfilling a desire he is alleged to have harbored to put out a new circus.<sup>63</sup>

The outfit's most experienced circus man was vice-president and general manager Ralph J. Clawson. We first run across Clawson with the John Robinson circus, a checker-up in 1928 and a twenty-four hour man for its '29 edition. Subsequently, he was with Ringling-Barnum (1936, '37, and '39), Hagenbeck Wallace (1937), Wallace Bros. (1944), and Clyde Beatty (1945), serving in various capacities including that of general manager for the Wallace and Beatty outfits.<sup>64</sup> It was Clawson who apparently put Johnson and Edgar together. However, the triumvirate would not last. Disagreements developed between Edgar, on the one hand, and Johnson and Clawson, on the other, leading to the resignation of the latter two in June whereupon Edgar became the chief operating officer.<sup>65</sup>

As early as July, 1946 Edgar had decided that for the next season (1947) Sparks would quit the roads and highways and become a brand new railroad circus.<sup>66</sup> A new railroad show would require considerable capital and more financial risk. Though Edgar was a rich man, he wisely limited his own financial commitment by finding others willing to venture capital. Arnold Maley, secretary-treasurer of the day-to-day Sparks operation, stated that the real backers of the show were a Saratoga Springs, N. Y. gambling syndicate, one member of which was an Eddie McEwen (or McEuen).<sup>67</sup> He would turn up again in 1949 as part of the Jack Tavlin group that bought the Cole Bros. circus.<sup>68</sup> Though McEuen's role with Cole was widely publicized, he and his fellow Sparks backers remained silently in the background of Edgar's enterprise. It is this scribe's guess that Edgar's de-



Newspaper ad for Sparks' 1947 dress rehearsal that was cancelled because rain made the lot unusable. Author's collection.

cision to go to the rails, no doubt supported by the syndicate, had something to do with the resignation of Messrs. Johnson and Clawson in June, 1946.

The old Sparks Circus had been a fixture along the east coast, and Edgar's 1946 motorized version concentrated on that territory with a season ending jaunt through Gulf coast states and into Texas, the only time the Sparks title was ever pitched to the people of that state. Closing was at Tyler on November 4th, more than a thousand miles from Sarasota.<sup>69</sup> As the 1947 edition would be an all new show on rails, there was no sense in bringing the

motorized version back to Florida. So, Edgar simply disposed of everything he could where the 1946 season ended in Texas.

Except for two straight trucks which would be used for the new railroad show, all the motorized equipment was sold in Beaumont.<sup>70</sup> The big top, some of the grandstand chairs, and other props went to Emil Schweyer, then a circus owner but formerly a wild animal trainer.<sup>71</sup> He is said to have come to this country from Europe with the Buffalo Bill wild west show when it returned from there at the end of the 1906 season. Later, during the teens, he presented animals in the big cage on the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus. Now, in 1946, he bought the aforesaid Sparks equipment for his American Circus being presented in Central and South America.<sup>72</sup>

The equipment, props, and animals (two elephants and 13 cats) Edgar had rented from Ringling for 1946 plus some items owned by his corporation, including part of the grandstand, were loaded into rail system baggage cars in Tyler on November 5th and sent by train to Sarasota. The cars were taken from Tyler over the Cotton Belt (St. Louis-Southwestern), Frisco (St. Louis-San Francisco), Southern, and Seaboard for the last leg into Sarasota (one report said Atlantic Coast Line instead of Seaboard). This routing would have taken them via Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Jacksonville where fast passenger train connections were available. They arrived at destination on November 8th. That made the total transit time from Tyler to Sarasota only three days, very impressive given that four separate railroads and at least as many different passenger trains handled the cars.<sup>73</sup> Would that present railroad interchange service were so fast!

It figures that the Ringling owned animals and equipment were sent out to the big one's quarters promptly upon being unloaded from the baggage cars in Sarasota. The leopards were to return to the

Sparks train on sidings just south of Atlantic Coast Line depot in Sarasota on March 6, 1947. The flats are at right background. Pfening Archives.



Ringling performance in 1947 which, for the first time since 1942, was being produced by John Ringling North. That cat act was a favorite of his, particularly the black leopards and black jaguars which had attracted him to Alfred Court in the first place.<sup>74</sup>

Such of the 1946 Sparks show as returned to Sarasota and belonged to Edgar's enterprise went into quarters on 33rd Street opposite the Ringling School of Art.<sup>75</sup> However, it would not stay there long as James Edgar soon moved to a new location—Venice.

#### SPARKS IN VENICE

In mid-November, 1946 James Edgar, Venice mayor Clyde V. Higel, and the City Council signed off on a lease, reportedly for five years, whereby the Sparks circus would establish winter quarters at the Venice airport. The show would use a large nose hangar and two T-shaped barracks on the northeastern end of the runways.<sup>76</sup> These buildings were close to an open field alongside the Tamiami Trail. That was the ground where the show would later set up its tents, the self-same spot where Ringling's arena building would be built fourteen years afterwards.

Venice was now a circus winter quarters city. In announcing the news, *Billboard's* editors felt compelled to headline that it was the Florida city.<sup>77</sup> Why? Because there was another place of the same name that had long been associated with the wintering of circuses, namely, Venice, California. Located on the ocean just south of Santa Monica, that greater Los Angeles community had been the off-season home of the Sells-Floto Circus during the winters of 1906-07 and 1907-08.<sup>78</sup> Four years later two shows arrived there to spend the off season. They were the Al G. Barnes Circus and the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show. The latter spent only that one winter (1911-12), but Barnes became a regular. It was back again in 1912-13 and for each winter thereafter through 1918-19, except for that of 1913-14 when it parked in Portland, Oregon.<sup>79</sup>

In 1940 and 1941, Ringling-Barnum's West Coast elephant herd was at Venice, California under Cheerful Gardner's supervision. All pachyderms remaining in that group (12 in number)



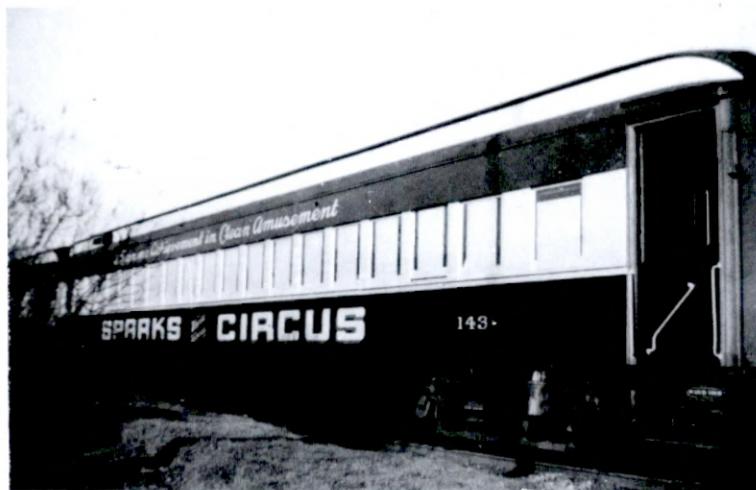
Executives of the show inside the 1947 Sparks big top at an early season stand. Left to right are Arnold Maley, treasurer, Marshall Green, general agent, James Edgar, owner and Paul Conway, general counsel. David Reddy Collection.

were shipped to Sarasota in January, 1942.<sup>80</sup> At the end of that year, the Arthur Bros. motorized circus ducked into quarters at Venice for the winter of 1942-43 and was there again the next time the weather turned cold (1943-44).<sup>81</sup>

Contemporaneously with Sparks move to Venice, Florida, its namesake Pacific city was again in the news as the winter haven of several modest motorized shows operated by circus, carnival and movie prop man Jimmie Wood. They were Yankee Patterson of 1945, a motorized version of the 101 Ranch Wild West in 1946, and Yankee Patterson again in 1947.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, when James Edgar installed his operation in a place named Venice, it was necessary to specify which one.

Physically, the Sparks Circus James Ed-

Sparks sleeper No. 143 in 1947. This and two others had been in coach service, apparently on the Jersey Central in 1946. They were converted to sleepers in Venice. Pfening Archives.



gar built in Venice, Florida during the winter of 1946-47 was a beauty. All the canvas was new from U. S. Tent and Awning Co. of Chicago. From Lewis Diesel Engine Co. of Memphis, Tennessee came 26 brand new wagons and cages, all of them designed to specifications so they would fit tightly and precisely on six flat cars.

Ten cars comprised the initial consist of the Sparks show train: 6 flats, 1 stock car, and 3 sleepers. Two of the flat cars had once been

with the Beckman & Gerety carnival and came from Shreveport, Louisiana where they had been stored since 1942 when that carny went out of business.<sup>84</sup> They were Warrens, i.e., made by the Warren Tank Car Co. of Warren, Pennsylvania. Another three flats were purchased from the Hoffner Thrall Co. of Chicago. Of those, one was made by welding two system flats together; we do not know whether the other two were new or used.<sup>85</sup> The three coaches with the show at the start of the season were purchased from an eastern railroad and converted to circus sleeper use. The accounts of their origin differ with the Atlantic Coast Line, Jersey Central and Pennsylvania all being credited. We are inclined to say here that they were from the Jersey Central.<sup>86</sup>

The lone stock car was rented from Ringling-Barnum.<sup>87</sup> One report had the sixth flat (another Warren) being leased from Ringling also, but we believe that information to have been incorrect.<sup>88</sup> Our guess is that it was from either the aforesaid carnival or Hoffner-Thrall and was purchased (not leased) by Sparks. Nine weeks into its 1947 season, at Toledo, Ohio in May, Sparks took delivery of another sleeper (No. 86) giving a total of four passenger cars thereafter. The new one was definitely on loan from Ringling-Barnum. It would be used by Edgar's show when it went into Canada for almost all the rest of its tour.<sup>89</sup> But, that is getting ahead of our story.

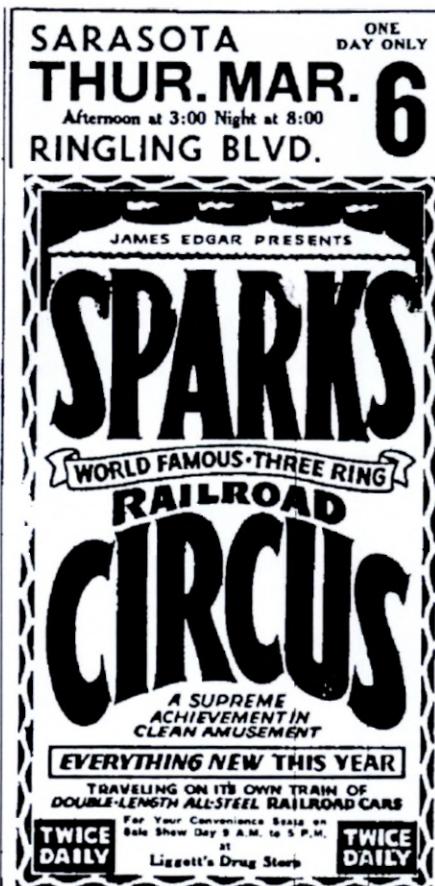
The original ten railroad cars for the new show arrived in Venice at different times. The three passenger cars were said to have left New York for Venice on Dec. 4, 1946; and by the 14th some flats and the stock car were reported as already on the "Venice siding," meaning, we assume, the Seaboard tracks at Center Road,

close to the airport/winter quarters. Some of the flats coming out of Shreveport (Beckman & Gerety) or Chicago (Hoffner-Thrall) seem to have been routed via Memphis (Lewis Diesel) so as to pick up the new wagons and bring them to Venice. We find reports of a flat with four of the new wagons arriving in Venice around mid-December, of another coming in loaded with wagons around mid-January, and of several more during the first half of February.<sup>90</sup>

Sparks' trainmaster was Philip A. McGrath. He certainly knew how to whip a circus train into shape having done it since the mid-1920s with shows such as Christy Bros., John Robinson, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Cole Bros., and the 1938 Robbins Bros.<sup>91</sup> In 1948 he would become boss of Ringling-Barnum's trains.<sup>92</sup> But, during the winter of 1946-47 his biggest job would be at Center Road in Venice remodeling the interior of the Sparks cars, converting them from regular passenger coaches to circus sleepers. On January 31, 1947 "three gaily painted sleeping coaches" were reported standing on the Center Road siding. Meanwhile, McGrath and company were busily painting the other cars and equipment.<sup>93</sup>

Edgar's 1947 train was attractively trimmed. The flat cars were painted silver with "SPARKS CIRCUS" in big red letters shaded in a darker color, probably blue. Loaded thereon were baggage and prop wagons in red with show title in big yellow letters shaded for sure in blue. There were six small cross cage wagons that loaded, not transverse the car as in olden days, but two abreast, lengthwise, so they could be pulled off without first having to be jockeyed around. They were painted silver; their sideboards had blue striping with the show title written cursive, also in blue. The lone stock car (No. 37) was red. Halfway up its sides was painted a broad white band that ran the length of the car. Below that, to each side of the center loading door, were affixed red title boards. On the left was the word "SPARKS," on the right "CIRCUS," both in yellow. The sleepers too were painted red. The line of windows was set in a broad horizontal band of white or yellow. Below that the show title was in big block yellow letters whilst between the windows and roof line in cursive writing was the old Sparks slogan, "A Supreme Achievement In Clean Amusement."<sup>94</sup>

Over at the airport the rest of the show was being put together under general superintendent Denny Helms with day to day work supervised by Charles Webb whose official title would be superintendent of canvas.<sup>95</sup> A training ring was installed in part of the rented hangar which was open on one side in the



This newspaper advertisement appeared in the Sarasota *Herald-Tribune* on March 2, 1947. Author's collection.

usual manner of such airfield structures. Ergo, it was called the "ring barn,"<sup>96</sup> notwithstanding that such a set up could hardly have imparted the aura of classicism one usually associates with that term. Aesthetically deprived though this "ring barn" might have been, trainer John C. White worked there perfecting the routines of various domestic animals to be featured in the 1947 Sparks program, to wit: trained ponies, pigs, Angora goats, and greyhounds.

John White had logged many a season as an animal trainer with such circuses as Downie Bros. and Al G. Barnes.<sup>97</sup> His roles with the 1947 Sparks aggregation, which included that of personnel director in addition to animal trainer, were in no little measure due to the fact that his daughter, Ann, was Mrs. James Edgar. She too pitched in, executing the costumes for the show.<sup>98</sup>

We have mentioned that Ringling-Barnum lent Sparks a couple of rail cars, a stock at the start and a sleeper later. However, its deal was not limited to that. It leased Edgar three more elephants for 1947. That gave him five Ringling owned Asian females: Topsy and Jessie, who had

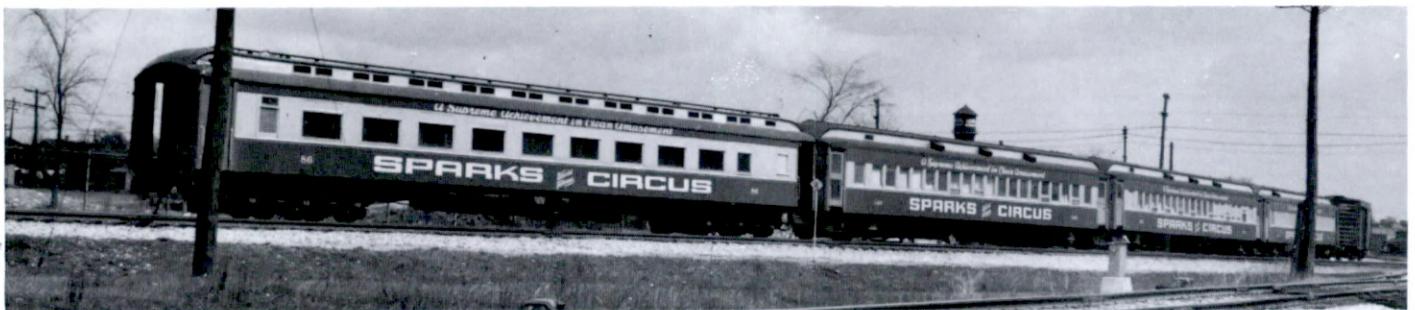
been on his 1946 Sparks motorized show, plus Cross Country Babe, Palm, and Vic added for the rail tour.<sup>99</sup> Sparks' 1947 big top center poles were from the big one too, their lengths being cut down to fit under Edgar's brand new but smaller top.<sup>100</sup>

Though the Ringling circus did not move to Venice itself until November, 1946, we see from the above that it had a substantial amount of property there fourteen years earlier. Big show bosses were frequently at the Venice airport quarters checking on Edgar's progress. Those whose visits were noted in *Billboard* were James A. Haley, Ringling-Barnum's president; Edward F. Kelly, its assistant manager; Herbert Duval, the legal adjuster; F. Beverly Kelley, Frank Morrissey and Edwin B. Callahan of the press department; Theo Forstall from the red ticket wagon; and Merle Evans, the big show's band director.<sup>101</sup>

As February, 1947 drew to a close, the winter quarters crews wrapped up their work. The cook house pots and pans were all shined and ready to go under the watchful eye of John M. Staley. That veteran of the tanbark trail, who first joined out with Barnum & Bailey way back in 1918 when only a teenager, had long been associated with circus culinary stewardship.<sup>102</sup> Charles Webb and his workers finished building the new grandstand and then, around February 21st, erected the all new canvas layout so that the show could get in a final week of rehearsals under the big top.<sup>103</sup>

Sparks' tents were set up on the open field at the Venice airport that we mentioned earlier. It was alongside the Tamiami Trail near its intersection with Center Road.<sup>104</sup> With all new canvas, Sparks' layout was impressive, the big top being a 120 foot round with three 40 foot middles and sidewalls 12 feet high. Except for a white main entrance marquee, all the canvas was a dark green and therefore drab when compared to the white or blue usually associated with circus tents. The green color was due to the fact that the fabric, though new, had been made by U. S. Tent for military use and with hostilities only recently ended had become surplus and therefore available for Edgar's new circus.<sup>105</sup> Venetians were no doubt excited at the sight of the setup as they drove past on the Tamiami Trail.

As far as we can determine Edgar's 1947 big top was the first pitched in Venice. Previously, the population could hardly have justified a circus date. Showmen wanting to play the area simply went to Sarasota less than twenty miles to the north. As late as 1947, there were only some 700 folks within the Venice city limits with maybe another 300 scattered



among such neighboring communities as Nokomis and Laurel.<sup>106</sup> Even so, James Edgar invited the public to a dress rehearsal under his new big top. Proceeds were to go to the No-Vel Post No. 159, American Legion.

The special benefit show was set for 2:30 p.m. Sunday afternoon, March 2nd with doors to open at 2:00. The local merchants bought ads in the Venice Gondolier thanking Edgar and the Sparks Circus and wishing them good luck. Venice anxiously awaited what we think would have been its first circus performance—for sure the first ever for a railroad show there. To minimize a scheduling conflict, the KMI Commandant, Col. Richmond, moved up the cadets' Sunday parade by a half hour so that the public could see both the military march and the circus.<sup>107</sup> Alas, the special Sparks show was not to be.

Heavy rain began at noon Saturday (March 1st) and by dawn of circus day more than four inches had fallen. The big top sagged, and a foot of water stood on the lot making it unusable for populace and performers alike. Show officials called off the performance, notifying the No-Vel Post of the American Legion. An announcement of the cancellation was broadcast. Even so, many did not get the message as carload after carload of hopeful circus goers began arriving in town at noon Sunday only to be sorely disappointed.<sup>108</sup>

Circus owner Edgar promised the Legionnaires he would stage the benefit when the show returned to Venice in the fall.<sup>109</sup> As we shall see, that did not happen either. Venetians thus missed their only opportunity ever to see an under canvas railroad circus on their home turf. To catch the 1947 Sparks show within their county, they would have to motor up the road to Sarasota where it played later in the week.

Instead of performing in Venice that Sunday afternoon, Sparks tore down, packed up, and departed its airport quarters. The wagons, lead stock, and personnel were variously towed, walked, and transported down muddy Center Road to the waiting railroad cars; and, after loading up, the Sparks' train pulled out.<sup>110</sup> It never returned. Thus ended

Four Sparks sleepers at Windsor, Ontario on May 5, 1947. The car on the end was No. 86, leased from Ringling-Barnum. It was delivered two days earlier at Toledo, Ohio and was to be used on the Canadian tour. The other three sleepers to the right were owned by the show. Pfening Archives.

Venice's first winter as the home base of a circus.

Sparks opened its 1947 season on March 4th in Ft. Myers, which is also a Gulf Coast city, located fifty miles south of Venice. The Seaboard Air Line served both and handled the move.<sup>111</sup> However, it was a rather circuitous trip because both the origin and destination were on separate lines of railroad with the nearest connection between them way up near Tampa.<sup>112</sup> In fact the very end of Seaboard's Venice line was in a wooded area 700 feet south of Center Road.

En route north from Venice, the Sparks train went through Sarasota. It rolled right down the middle of Pineapple and Lemon Avenues—we mean smack-dab in the center of those two busy streets, for that was the way Seaboard's tracks traversed the city. Sarasotans were accustomed to seeing the Ringling trains coming down those streets as Seaboard had no other way to reach the big show's winter quarters.<sup>113</sup> However, for those up and about when Sparks passed through, they saw something that would never happen again: a circus train other than Ringling's rolling along Pineapple and Lemon Avenues. Once up near Tampa, the Sparks train swung east and then turned back south over Seaboard's line to Ft. Myers.

After Ft. Myers Sparks played Arcadia (5th) and then Sarasota on the 6th. Seaboard's arch competitor, the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL), handled the train to Sarasota.<sup>114</sup> This too involved a most unusual railroad move requiring some elaboration. ACL brought the train to Sarasota via the "back door" over what, for convenience, we will here call its "Fruitville line" after a neighborhood of that name which lies close to, and east of, the place where Ringling's Sarasota winter quarters were located.

From downtown Sarasota ACL's Fruitville line ran due east passing a mile south of Ringling's winter layout. A spur track turned off and ran up into the quarters. From the quarters' turnout, the Fruitville line continued southeasterly through its namesake community, then Belspur, across the Myakka River, and on through farmland, woods, and bogs, terminating at a junction with ACL's Arcadia-Naples line, 41 miles east of Sarasota.<sup>115</sup> As a point of further orientation, readers familiar with Sarasota will know Fruitville Road as the main drag leading out of town toward the old winter quarters and, in more recent years, to I-75's Exit 39. Our subject railroad line ran roughly parallel to and just south of Fruitville Road, gradually taking a more southeasterly course.

The Fruitville line afforded the 1947 Sparks Circus a direct haul of only 54 rail miles from Arcadia to Sarasota.<sup>116</sup> As far as we know, this was only the second time, and for sure the last, that a circus train entered or left Sarasota over this particular line of railroad. Ringling-Barnum certainly never did. The only other instance of its use by a circus that we can divine occurred in 1931 when the old Sparks show left Ft. Myers (played on November 6th) and used the Fruitville line to reach Sarasota for its last engagement ever on November 7th.<sup>117</sup>

ACL had built its Fruitville line between 1925 and 1927, completing it just as the Florida real estate market came crashing down followed shortly by the Great Depression. Running though largely empty land, agricultural and timber traffic never developed as anticipated; and it never carried much freight. It was abandoned east of Fruitville in 1949,<sup>118</sup> and in 1981 was cut back even further to the place where the Ringling winter quarters spur once turned out.<sup>119</sup> But, it did see two circuses pass its way, the fifteen car 1931 Sparks Circus and Edgar's ten car 1947 version thereof, and now back to that.

In Sarasota the Sparks train unloaded just south of the ACL depot where there were extensive sidings so that the cars could stay there throughout the day.<sup>120</sup> The depot and sidings were adjacent to



the Ringling Boulevard showgrounds where the tents were set up. Long used for circuses, these grounds were part of an open area which included baseball and trailer parks. Ringling-Barnum would later close its 1947 season on the site, the last engagement the big one ever played in downtown Sarasota.<sup>121</sup> However, when Sparks came to Sarasota in March of that year, Ringling still lay in its lair there. It still had another month before launching its behemoth 1947 edition--108 railroad cars, arguably the largest circus in history. And, the big one reacted to Sparks' Sarasota date as to a homecoming.

Ringling-Barnum folks were all over the Sparks lot, some even participating in its two performances. Early that morning Edgar was joined on the grounds by RBBB's general manager George W. Smith and his assistant, Ed Kelley. General performance director Pat Valdo was in the backyard. Blowing the whistle to start the matinee was the peerless and impeccable Fred Bradna, Ringling's equestrian director emeritus.<sup>122</sup> He was then 75 years old and had ruled the rings of the Greatest Show On Earth for thirty years until a 1945 injury forced his retirement from active duty.<sup>123</sup>

Sparks bandleader Henry Kyes saw his ensemble augmented by Merle Evans. That renowned symphonist of circus sound played third trumpet at the matinee and first at the nighttime show. The percussion section was amplified by Ringling drummer Ray Floyd while its photographer Ed Callahan took pictures--so too Dick Miller.<sup>124</sup> Edgar's special guests at his evening performance in Sarasota were Ringling-Barnum's president James A. Haley, his wife and fellow circus officer, Aubrey Haley, and her daughter, Mable Ringling. *Billboard* described those invitees as, "members of the royal family of circuses."<sup>124</sup> Showing off his brand new railroad show before friends and mentors, Edgar's Sarasota date must have been for him a proud moment.

The Sparks Circus midway and marquee in Guelph, Ontario, Canada on May 21, 1947. Pfening Archives.

The euphoria of Sarasota would not last. Nor would the weather. The sun stayed out only through the next date in Bradenton. At Tampa the rains came.<sup>125</sup> They would plague the show throughout 1947. After additional Florida towns, Sparks' itinerary took it into Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, and then to Ohio. Following the Toledo date (May 3rd and 4th), the show went into Canada where it played two-thirds of its total 1947 tour. Sparks had engagements in all nine of the then-existent provinces, from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island on the Atlantic to British Columbia on the Pacific. In all, 17 of its 27 weeks were spent north of the border.<sup>126</sup>

When the Canadian tour was finished at the end of August, so was the show. Leaving a trail of poor attendance and mounting losses, Sparks limped back across the line into the State of Washington and played there for a week before folding. The silent backers, the aforementioned New York syndicate whose role had never been publicly revealed, would not provide any more money; and Edgar wisely decided not to risk any more of his. The last performance was given in Tacoma on September 7, 1947. It was Edgar's and the Sparks title's last circus stand ever.<sup>127</sup>

Sparks' end came 3,100 miles from its Venice base. Bringing it back there was out of the question. So, it was broken up where it crashed. Edgar arranged with the War Assets Administration to move the show train into part of the immense Boeing aircraft plant at Renton, Washington on the southeastern side of Seattle. From there the properties would be dispersed, some by sale, more by legal process.<sup>128</sup>

Lewis Diesel foreclosed its lien on the spiffy new wagons, took them back, and sold them to the Clyde Beatty Circus.

When Beatty quit the rails in 1956, a number of them went to the James E. Strates railroad carnival. In 1987 the Circus World Museum got six of these former Sparks wagons, one from the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. circus and five from Strates.<sup>129</sup>

The six Sparks 1947 flats and the three sleepers it owned got tied up in two years of litigation over a suit in King County (Seattle) in which sideshow manager Pete Kortes finally prevailed against James Edgar for failure to repay a loan. Meanwhile, shortly after the train had been parked at the Boeing plant, Ringling-Barnum's sleeper No. 86 and its stock car loaded with its five elephants and other properties were sent back to Sarasota.<sup>130</sup>

James Edgar returned to Detroit and his family's sugar brokerage and warehouse operations there, splitting time between his homes in Detroit and Sarasota. He never again tried his hand at the circus. Though his big top venture ended ingloriously, he had made two significant contributions to circus history by framing the last new under canvas railroad show and by putting Venice, Florida on the circus map.

On June 6, 1957 James and Ann Edgar left Detroit driving to Indiana to pick up their son, William Henry, at the Culver Military Academy. They stopped overnight at a hotel in South Bend. The next morning, June 7th, James Edgar suffered a sudden, massive heart attack. He was rushed to a hospital where he was pronounced dead at 10:05 a.m. He was 47.<sup>131</sup>

In the next installment we will watch Venice flirt with the Cavalcade of Amusements carnival and see Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey end its thirty-three year Sarasota run and move down the road to new Venice quarters.

#### NOTES

The historical sketch of Venice is based primarily on the following: (a) George E. Youngberg Sr. and W. Earl Aumann, *Venice and The Venice Area*, Sunshine Press, Venice, Florida (1969, 2nd printing 1976), which, for brevity, will be referred to in the numbered notes as "Venice;" (b) Anonymous, "The History Of Venice," a supplement to the *Venice (Florida) Gondolier and Sun Coast Times*, June 29, 1983, hereafter "History of Venice;" and (c) Del Marth, *Yesterday's Sarasota, Including Sarasota County*, E. A. Seeman Publishing, Inc., Miami, Florida, paperback edition (1977), hereafter "Yesterday's Sarasota."

Much of the information about the Sparks Circus in 1946 and 1947 is taken from the following excellent, in depth, season histories: (a) William L. Elbirt, "Sparks Circus, Season of 1946," *Bandwagon*, November-December, 1964, pp. 6-11, for brevity referred to in the numbered notes which follow as "Elbirt/Sparks 1946;" and (b) Joseph T. Bradbury, "Sparks Circus, Season of 1947," *Bandwagon*, (in three parts), Part I, January-February, 1970, pp. 4-14; Part II, March-April, 1970, pp. 20-26; Part III,

supplemental comments, September-October, 1970, pp. 22-23; plus additional commentary, January-February, 1975, p. 19, all referred to hereafter as "Bradbury/Sparks 1947."

In addition to those specified above, frequently cited journals and periodicals will be referenced with these abbreviations: *Bandwagon* ("BW"), *Billboard* ("BB"), *Venice* (Florida) *Gondolier* ("VG"), and *White Tops*, ("WT").

References to the Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin will be "CWM collections."

1. 1992 was the last year that Venice was considered Ringling-Barnum's winter home. Though its purchasing and truck departments remained there for a time into 1993, everything else was gone by the end of 1992 (Gerald R. "Charlie" Smith interviews, July 8, 1993 and November 16, 1994).

2. *Venice*, p. 18 gave 1888 whereas "History of Venice," p. 38 said 1885. Betty Arnall, Venice Area Historical Collection (in litt, September 22, 1994) said 1888 is the correct year.

3. *Venice*, p. 17-18 and "History of Venice," pp. 38-39.

4. *Venice*, pp. 18 and 30-31 and "History of Venice," pp. 38-39.

5. *Venice*, pp. 22-23 and Elmer G. Sulzer, *Ghost Railroads of Sarasota County*, Sarasota Historical Commission, (1971), pp. 31 and 34. According to the latter, the line opened into Sarasota in 1903 was built by the United States & West Indies Railroad which shortly thereafter was renamed the Florida West Shore Railway. It was acquired by the Seaboard Air Line in 1909.

6. *Venice*, pp. 23-24 and 30; "History of Venice," pp. 38-39; and *Yesterday's Sarasota*, p. 55.

7. *Venice*, pp. 30 and 59.

8. *Venice*, p. 27 and *Yesterday's Sarasota*, pp. 86 and 111.

9. *Venice*, p. 31 and *Yesterday's Sarasota*, pp. 114 and 132.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Sources differ as to the total acreage acquired by BLE. *Venice*, p. 31 said 50,000 initially plus 27,000 added later (77,000 total) whereas *Yesterday's Sarasota*, p. 132 said 30,000 initially and 25,000 later (55,000 total). We believe *Venice* to be more authoritative. For a description of the industrial and farm areas see *Venice*, pp. 39-41.

12. *Venice*, p. 38.

13. *VG*, December 1, 1960, p.7.

14. *Venice*, pp. 27-29. Also: Virginia Dean, *Naples On The Gulf*, Windsor Publications, Chatsworth, CA. (1991) pp. 36-42 and Col. Frank J. Tenney Jr. (USAF Ret.), "Across The Everglades With The Trail Builders," and "Everglades' Greatest Day," both in *Collier County Heritage*, Heritage Publishing, Naples, FL. (circa 1976), pp. 9-18 and 44.

15. *Venice*, pp. 34-35; "History of Venice," p. 22; *Venice* (Florida) *News*, April 1, 1927, p. 1; and *VG*, April 26 and 29, 1971.

16. *Venice*, pp. 36-37 and 57; "History of Venice," p. 26; and *Yesterday's Sarasota*, p. 133.

17. *Venice*, pp. 57-58.

18. *Venice*, pp. 58 and 61; *Yesterday's Sarasota*, pp. 132-133; and Betty Arnall, Venice Area Historical Collection, in litt. September 22, 1994 and interview, October 14, 1994.

19. *Venice*, p. 62; "History of Venice," pp. 2 and 16; *VG*, June 4, 1965, p. 4D; and *Tampa* (Florida) *Tribune*, April 20, 1973.

OFFICIAL ROUTE - SEASON OF 1947				
DATE	TOWN	STATE	S.E.	MILES
Mar. 4	Fort Myers	Fla.	SAL	
Mar. 5	Arcadia	Fla.	SAL ACL	45
Mar. 6	Sarasota	Fla.	ACL	54
Mar. 7	Bradenton	Fla.	ACL	11
Mar. 8	Tampa	Fla.	ACL	45
Mar. 9	Tampa	Fla.		
1st Week				
Mar. 10	St. Petersburg	Fla.	ACL SAL	35
Mar. 11	Clearwater	Fla.	SAL	35
Mar. 12	Bartow	Fla.	SAL ACL	77
Mar. 13	Winter Haven	Fla.	ACL	18
Mar. 14	Lakeland	Fla.	ACL	17
Mar. 15	Orlando	Fla.	ACL	62
2nd Week				
Total Milesage				
				405

The No. 1 1947 Sparks Circus route card. Pfening Archives.

20. *VG*, June 4, 1965, p. 4D and January 6, 1966, p. 1.

21. *BB*, March 8, 1947, p. 47 and Mable Ringling, in litt. October 6, 1994.

22. *VG*, June 4, 1965, p. 4D.

23. *Ibid.*

24. R. Lyle Key Jr., *Midwest Florida Sunliners*, R P C Publications, Godfrey, IL. (1979), p. 155.

25. *Ibid* and Sarasota (Florida) *Herald*, October 27 and December 4, 1928.

26. Examples of Ringling-Barnum trains traveling over ACL's Perry Cut Off were the run from Atlanta, Georgia to Sarasota at the end of the 1931 season and the jump from Sarasota to Akron, Ohio in 1944 to begin the stadium tour following the Hartford fire.

27. See Key, Note 24, *supra*, p. 155.

28. Paul Thayer, "Era Ends-KMI Closes its Doors," *VG*, June 21, 1973.

29. *Venice*, pp. 59-60.

30. *Ibid* and Greater Venice Area Chamber of Commerce, "Health Care," *Greater Venice Florida Area*, See Publications, Inc., Sarasota, FL. (1985), p. 124.

31. "Irvin Feld Dies In Florida," *WT*, September-October, 1984, p. 44 and Betty Arnall, Venice Area Historical Collection, in litt. September 22, 1994.

32. Joseph T. Bradbury, "Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Season of 1953," *WT*, September-October, 1989, p. 46.

33. Gayle White, "Just As I Am: Throng Will Heed Altar Call-Invitation is a Graham trademark," Atlanta (Georgia) *Journal Constitution*, October 22, 1994, p. E6 after Graham biographer William Martin's *A Prophet With Honor*.

34. *Venice*, p. 62 and Sarasota (Florida) *Herald-Tribune*, August 26, 29, and 31, 1941.

35. *Venice*, p. 62; "History of Venice," p. 16; and Betty Arnall, Venice Area Historical Collection, in litt. September 22, 1994.

36. *Venice*, pp. 62 and 65 and *VG*, June 16, 1960.

37. *Venice*, pp. 62 and 65.

38. *Ibid.*

39. "Mrs. James Edgar Is Dead: Leader in Clubs and Society," November, 27, 1934 Detroit obituary (unidentified newspaper). This and all Detroit newspapers cited in Notes 40-42, infra, are from clippings in the Burton Historical Col-

lection, Detroit Public Library.

40. *Ibid.* Also Polk's *Detroit City Directory*, 1930-31, R. C. Polk & Co., Detroit, MI, p. 713 and Detroit (Michigan) *News*, April 14, 1936.

41. "Detroit Sugar Heir To Marry," Detroit clipping (unidentified newspaper) dated October 20, 1934 and Detroit (Michigan) *Free Press*, April 14, 1936.

42. James Edgar II Suing Wealthy Friend Of Wife-Misconduct in Room of Exclusive Hotel Charged," Detroit (Michigan) *Free Press*, April 14, 1936; John M. Carlisle, "Edgar's 'Rival' Cries 'Slander,'" Detroit (Michigan) *News*, April 14, 1936; "James Edgar, 47, Sugar Executive," Detroit obituary (unidentified newspaper) dated June 8, 1957; and "Warehouse Executive Edgar Dies," Detroit obituary (unidentified newspaper) dated June 8, 1957.

43. George L. Chindahl, "The Albert M. Wetter Circus," *WT*, November-December, 1953, pp. 3-7 and Fred D. Pfening Jr., "Albert M. Wetter Circus-A Wagon Show One Hundred Years Ago," *BW*, November-December, 1993, pp. 32-39.

44. George L. Chindahl, "The W. B. Reynolds Circus," *WT*, July-August, 1950, pp. 7-8 and 18.

45. Fred D. Pfening Jr., "So You Always Wanted To Own A Circus-The Great Fred J. Mack Circus in 1955," *BW* July-August, 1984, pp. 4-12.

46. *BB*, January 12, 1946; *VG*, January 31, 1947; *Elbirt/Sparks* 1946, p. 6; and Paul Ringling interview, October 12, 1940.

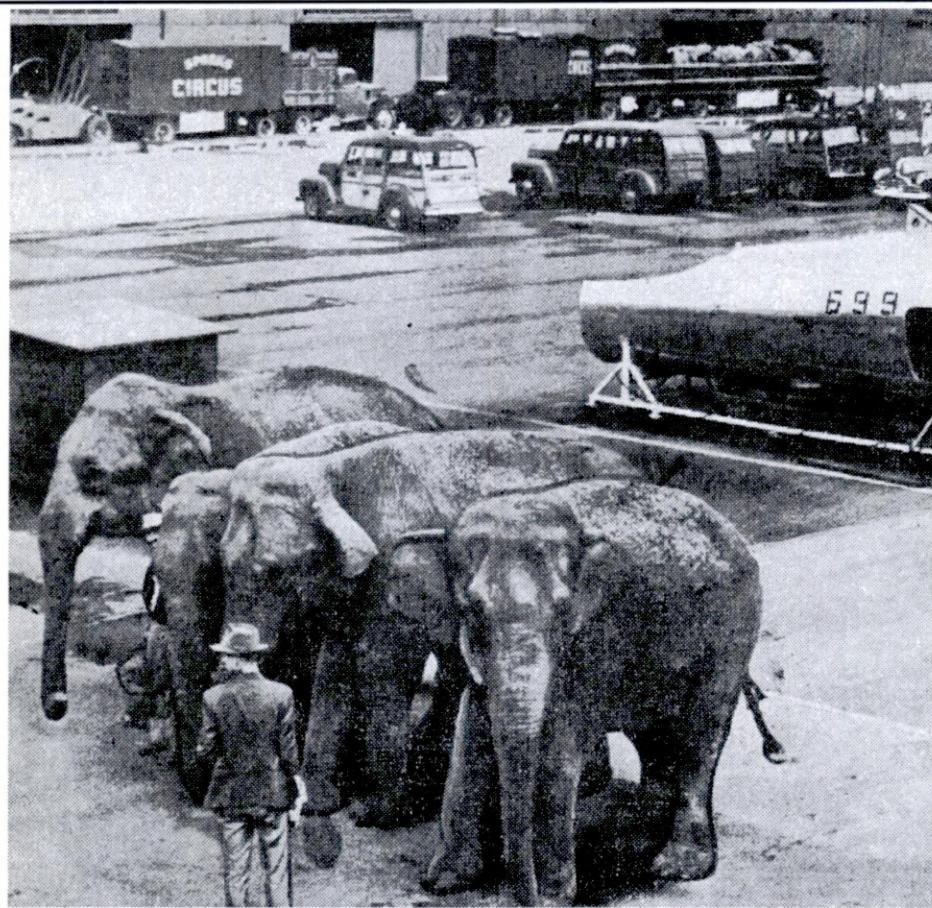
47. *BB*, November 30, 1946, p. 49.

48. *Elbirt/Sparks* 1946, p. 6 and *BB*, February 16, 1946, p. 64.

49. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part III, p. 22 quoting Ross "Doc" Hankins.

50. *BB*, February 23, 1946 p. 52 carried the story of the Ringling agreement to lease the Sparks title to Edgar. Sam Gumpertz managed the Ringling-Barnum organization from 1933 through 1937. Anxious to get whatever he could during those tough times, Gumpertz made three deals that we are aware of to lease famous Ringling owned titles to outsiders. He first let Edward Arlington and J. Frank Hatch plus their successor in interest, Howard Y. Bary, assume operation of the Hagenbeck Wallace circus for 1937, an arrangement continued by Bary into 1938. However that involved leasing an already intact circus as opposed to one that was to be renamed or built new. In the second of the deals, Gumpertz agreed to let Bary have the Sparks and John Robinson titles for a new 1937 show. That fell through when Bary bought out Arlington's and Hatch's lease of Hagenbeck Wallace. The third Gumpertz arrangement also seems to have taken place in 1937. In that one, Charles Sparks was to retrieve under lease from Ringling his own title (Sparks Circus) plus that of John Robinson for use on a planned 1938 conversion from trucks to rails of his motorized Downie Bros show. It never happened. See: Joseph T. Bradbury, "Sparks Circus, Season of 1931," *BW*, November-December, 1984, p. 6 at 19.

When Jesse Adkins and Zack Terrell were planning their secondary rail show in 1938 (Cole Bros. being their primary one), they made an offer to lease the John Robinson title from Ringling. By then, however, John Ringling North was in charge, and he would not agree. So, Messrs. Adkins and Terrell wound up naming their second 1938 circus "Robbins Bros." See: Joseph T. Bradbury, "Al G. Barnes



and Sells Floto Combined Circus, Season of 1938," *WT*, November-December, 1967, p. 4 at 7. Aside from James Edgar's deal on the Sparks title, the foregoing are all the instances, of which we are aware, where the Ringling organization was approached by outsiders wanting to lease circus titles.

51. Paul Ringling interview, September 21, 1994.

52. Henry S. Cohen and David Boller, *The Great Hartford Circus Fire*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. (1991), pp. 7-9 and 14.

53. *Ibid.* pp. 52-53 and Joseph T. Bradbury, "The Season of 1945, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus," *WT*, November-December, 1981, pp. 27 and 31.

54. Mable Ringling interview, September 23, 1994 and Anonymous, "Ringling Wrangling," *Fortune*, July, 1947, pp. 114 and 162-167.

55. David L. Hammarstrom, *Big Top Boss: John Ringling North and the Circus*, University of Chicago Press (1992), pp. 30-31 and 96-98.

56. *New York Times*, April 19, 1945 and *BB*, April 28, 1945, p. 35.

57. *Fortune*, see Note 54, supra.

58. Elbirn/Sparks 1946, p. 7.

59. *Ibid.* Besides the two in the Dhotre act, male "Negus" and female "Zougou," the only other black jaguar in an American circus ring, as far as we know, was a male presented by Mabel Stark on Ringling-Barnum in the early 1920s. See: Mabel Stark, *Hold That Tiger*, Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho (1938), pp. 171-185.

60. Alfred Court, *Wild Circus Animals*, Burke Publishing Co., Ltd., London (1954) p. 9 and 190-191. Also, "The Leopard Act," *WT*, March-April, 1993, p. 39 in which Walter Earl Flint de

Sparks elephants lined up along bomber fuselages as the circus moved into an unused section of the Boeing bomber plant in Renton, Washington. The wagons are at the top. Pfening Archives.

scribed the ladies and leopards act giving the names of all human and feline participants.

61. In addition to the cats in the leopard act, Ringling-Barnum, on November 17, 1944, also purchased from Court 9 lions, 3 Great Dane dogs, and 4 polar and 2 Canadian black bears. Surprisingly, no tigers were included in the sale. By 1946 none of these other animals appear to have been organized into a working group.

62. In his "The Season of 1946, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus," *WT*, November-December, 1982, p. 46 at 47, Joseph Bradbury suggests that Robert Ringling, big show president and producer of the '46 performance, may have been partly motivated to omit the big cage from that edition because his late father, Charles, had not liked wild animal acts and was instrumental in eliminating them after a four year experiment in 1921-24. On the other hand, Fred D. Pfening Jr. in his, "Masters Of the Steel Arena," *BW*, May-June, 1972, p. 4 at 11-12 was of the view that it was John Ringling who did not care for such numbers.

63. Elbirn/Sparks 1946, p. 6.

64. CWM collections, biographical files.

65. Elbirn/Sparks 1946, p. 9.

66. *Ibid.* Also, Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 4.

67. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part II, p. 23.

68. Joseph T. Bradbury, "The New Cole Bros. Circus-Season of 1949," *BW*, May-June, 1980. p. 4.

69. Elbirn/Sparks 1946, pp. 10-11.

70. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 6 and *BB*, November 23, 1946, p. 62.

71. *BB*, November 16, 1946.

72. William B. Hall III, "Tanbark Topics," *WT*, March-April, 1966, p. 24 after Robert N. Mayer, Miami, Fl; Pfening on steel arenas (p. 6), cited in Note 62, *supra*; and *BB*, November 16, 1946. 73. *BB*, November 16 and 23, 1946.

74. Richard J. Reynolds III, "Alfred Court And His Performing Snow Leopards," *International Pedigree Book of Snow Leopards*, Vol 4, Helsinki Zoo, Finland (1984), pp. 79-84.

75. *BB*, November 23, 1946, p. 62.

76. *VC*, November 15, 1946, p. 1 and *BB*, November 30, 1946, p. 49.

77. *BB*, November 30, 1946, p. 49.

78. Gordon M. Carver, "Sells Floto Circus, 1906-1910," *BW*, July-August, 1974, p. 4 at 6 and 10.

79. Robert S. MacDougall, "Al G. Barnes, The Early Years of the Wild Animal Show," (Part II), *BW*, p. 16 at 19-20, including a drawing (p. 19) of the Venice, California winter quarters. In addition, Chang Reynolds traced the use of Venice as a winter quarters for the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West and the Al G. Barnes Circus through the winter of 1918-1919 in a series of six papers appearing in *BW* to wit: January-February, 1969, p. 4 at 19; March-April, 1982, p. 3 at 6 and 10; September-October, 1982, p. 4 at 6 and 12; January-February, 1983, p. 4 at 5, 9, 10, and 17; November-December, 1983, pp. 15, 20-22, and 27; and March-April, 1984, pp. 4 and 11.

80. Don Carson, Lomita, California, in litt. October 24, 1994 and William Woodcock Jr., "Ringling Elephant History" (1940-1941), unpublished manuscript.

81. William Elbirn, "Arthur Bros. Circus, 2nd Largest Show On Earth," *BW*, November-December, 1992, p. 4.

82. Don Carson cited in Note 80, *supra*. See also three papers by Bob Taber on Jimmie (also "Jimmy") Wood and his 1945, 1946, and 1947 shows published in *BW* to wit: November-December, 1966, pp. 18-21; March-April, 1967, pp. 7-13; and November-December, 1967, p. 15. Wood's 1946 101 Ranch show had no relationship to the big railroad show of the 1920s except for permission from Zack Miller to use the name.

83. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, pp. 6 and 13.

84. *Ibid.* p. 5. Also: Bob Goldsack, *Those Wonderful, Colorful and Exciting Carnival Trains*, Midway Museum Publications, Nashua, NH (1991), p. 87.

85. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 5.

86. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 5, after Arnold Maley, said the coaches came from the Pennsylvania RR. That was based on Maley's recollection some 20 years after the fact. *BB*, November 16, 1946 said they were from the ACL. Most persuasive to us, however, is *BB*, December 21, 1946 which stated, ". . . coaches left New York Wednesday (4). [They] are just out of service of the Jersey Central Railroad, from which they were purchased . . ." *BB*, February 8, 1947, again stated that the three coaches were from the Jersey Central.

87. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 5.

88. *Ibid.* Bradbury, again after Arnold Maley,

said the 6th flat car came from Ringling under lease, but we disagree. First off, the Big Show needed all its flats for its own huge 1947 edition. It used 53 that year or 5 more than the previous season. The show was so hard up for flats in '47 that for the first time since 1942 (when 53 were also used), it had to employ several former Al G. Barnes stock cars that had been cut down and converted into flat cars. Given that scenario, we think it unlikely that Ringling would send a perfectly good Warren flat to another show. Even more significant, however, is that *all six* of the Sparks flats were later attached in the State of Washington and sold pursuant to legal process. Had the 6th flat been Ringling property, it would not have been seized and sold but would have been sent back to Sarasota as were the Ringling stock and sleeper. So, we say it was not leased from Ringling but, instead, was owned by Edgar's organization.

We accept the premise that Sparks' lone stock car was leased from Ringling because it should have had several extras. RBBB had carried 23 stocks in the 1930s but with the switch from baggage stock to trucks and tractors at the end of that decade no longer needed near that number, using only 13 in 1947.

89. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, pp. 4 and 14. Further, equipment records maintained by RBBB manager Willis E. Lawson list car No. 86 with Sparks in 1947. Those records were published in Joe McKennon, *Logistics Of The American Circus* (Supplement), Carnival Publications, Sarasota, FL. (1984), pp. 26 and 30.

90. BB, December 21, 1946, p. 48 and February 1, 1947, p. 32 and VG, January 31, 1947, p. 6 and February 21, 1947, p. 1. Also: letter from Arnold Maley (Sparks) to Simmons (mattress company) dated December 19, 1946 in CWM collections.

91. CWM collections, biographical files.

92. *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows-Route, Personnel, and Statistics for the Season Of 1948*, p. 31.

93. VG, January 31, 1947, p. 6 and BB, February 1, 1947, p. 32.

94. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, pp. 4-6.

95. BB, February 1, 1947, p. 32. Also: letter to Joseph Bradbury from Stuart Thayer, October 8, 1969, with information from Charles Webb re framing the 1947 Sparks circus.

96. BB, February 1, 1947, p. 32. Gerald R. "Charlie" Smith visited the Sparks' winter quarters and recalled (interview, November 16, 1994) that the ring was in an open sided hangar.

97. CWM collections, biographical files.

98. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, pp. 8 and 10.

99. The names of the 5 elephants as presented here are found in the Lawson (RBBB) records published by McKennon. [See note 89, *supra*.] The same elephants were named by Sparks' Charles Webb and reported by Thayer [See note 95, *supra*]. There are some differences between these and the elephant names given in Elbirt/Sparks 1946 and Bradbury/Sparks 1947. We say Lawson and Webb should be accepted as correct.

100. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 6.

101. BB, December 21, 1946, p. 48 and February 1, 1947, p. 32.

102. John M. Staley, "The Bridgeport Winter Quarters Paint Shop," BW, January-February, 1972, pp. 15-16.



Another view of the Sparks elephants and wagons at the Boeing plant in Renton, Washington. Michale Sporrer collection.

Lithographing Company, Salt Lake City, Utah (1966), pp. 108 (map) and 109.

119. Interviews with neighbors living around the junction of the Fruitville line with the turnout for the former Ringling quarters spur track, August 14, 1983.

120. We would refer to the photograph of Sparks cars on the bottom of p. 20 of Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part II. Careful study of the track layout and its relationship to physical features, including the position of the large tree in the background, tell us the picture was taken just south of ACL's Sarasota depot. That would mean that the flats shown in the background (far right) were those of Sparks and not RBBB as suggested in the caption.

121. Sarasota (Florida) *Herald Tribune*, November 21, 23, and 24, 1947. See also: *Pelican Press Circus Special*, Sarasota, FL, March 28, 1985 with Steinmetz photos (p. 3A) of RBBB setting up on the Ringling Boulevard lot for the last time (1947). RBBB played Sarasota only twice more (1951 and 1955), and in each of those instances it set up at winter quarters.

122. BB, March 22, 1947, pp. 48 and 91.

123. Fred Bradna and Hartzel Spence, *The Big Top*, Simon and Schuster, New York (1952), pp. 6, 89, and 300-301.

124. BB, March 22 and 29, 1947. Mable Ringling, the Haleys, and the other Big Show brass attended the Sparks show at its Sarasota stand, not Ft. Myers as stated in Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part I, p. 9.

125. BB, March 22, 1947, p. 91.

126. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Parts I and II.

127. *Ibid.*

128. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part II, pp. 23-25.

129. *Ibid.* Also: Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part III and Circus World Museum, *Newsletter*, Baraboo, WI., October, 1987, p. 3.

130. Bradbury/Sparks 1947, Part II, pp. 24-25.

131. See obituaries from Detroit newspapers cited in Note 42, *supra*. Also, BB, June 17, 1957, p. 76.

# Season's Greetings

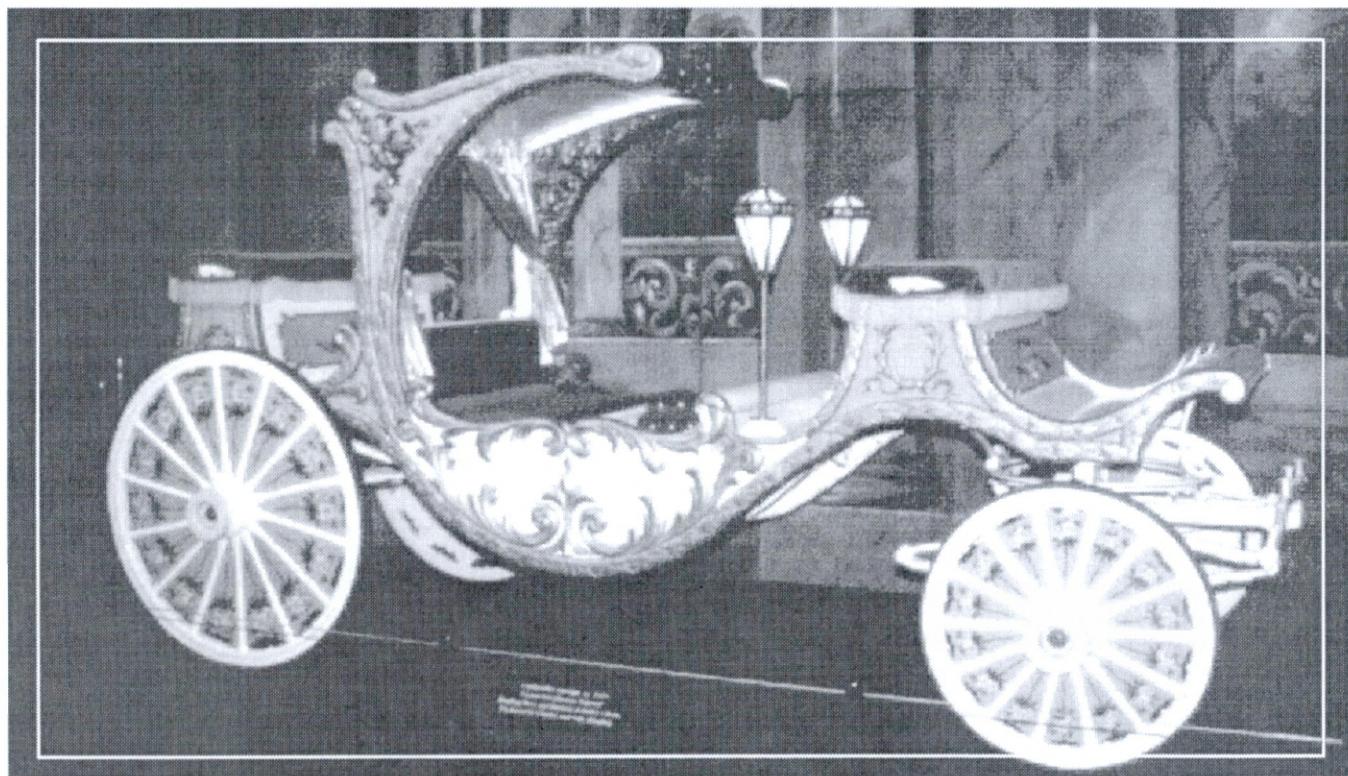


to our Circus Friends  
Everywhere

**Tommy, Struppi and Nellie  
Hanneford**

# Season's Greetings

*From The Staff Of*



A Century of Spectacle, a colossal exhibit unveiled at Circus World Museum in 1994, features the enchanting 1920s Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Cinderella Carriage.

CONGRATULATIONS  
FATHER JACK TONER  
on the occasion of your  
GOLDEN JUBILEE



Shown At The 1994 Big E:  
Wayne McCary, Father Toner And Tommy Hannford

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL  
Wayne McCary, President  
EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION

**S**eat wagons and canvas spools are standard equipment on circuses today. Both were introduced seventy-five years ago by a remarkable circus mechanic.

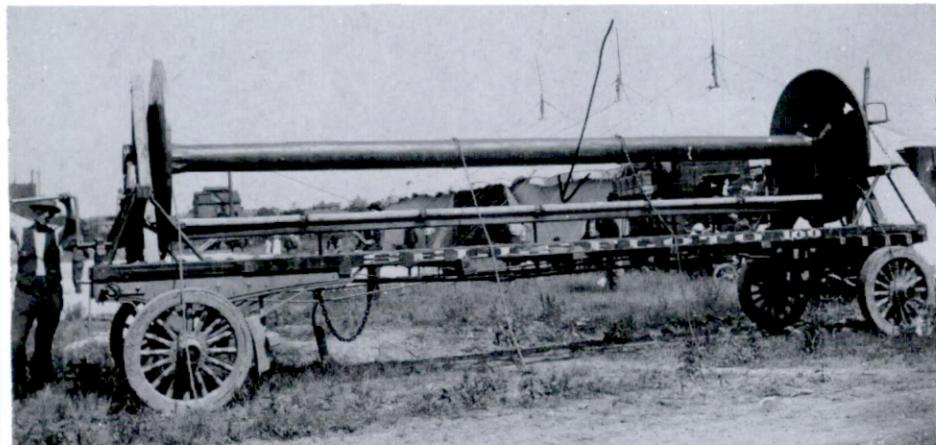
William Hanford Curtis was born in December 1873 on a farm near Hazelhurst, Mississippi. At age sixteen he joined out with the Charles Andrews Circus in New Orleans as a pony boy. He moved quickly to the Harris Nickel Plate show and then to Sells Bros. With his farm background he became a six horse driver. In 1892 he returned to the Harris show as assistant big top canvas boss. It was here that he found his niche. Tours with Adam Forepaugh and Pawnee Bill followed.

From 1902 to 1907 Curtis was superintendent of canvas on the John Robinson show. Years later he said his years with Robinson were the most enjoyable of his career. The large tents there provided him opportunity to try new ideas.

After leaving the Robinson show he went to Coney Island, New York to set up the Coney Island Hippodrome. The big top was secured to the back of a two story hotel that faced the ocean. Money for the show had been promoted from Cincinnati, Ohio breweries, a bar was placed at each end of the tent to serve beer. Three weeks later the circus fell like a ton of bricks.

In 1908 Curtis ventured west to join the Sells-Floto show as canvas boss and master mechanic. It was here that he continued his contribution to the mechanization of the circus. His invention of a truss system using cables to secure stringer beams of circus seating prevented the collapse grandstands and blues. The installation of the cable eliminated the use

The first Curtis canvas spool on Sells-Floto in 1911. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise identified.



## Mechanization Of The Circus SEAT WAGONS AND CANVAS SPOOLS

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

of the old toe-pin and held stringers so securely that no collapse has been recorded where the system was used.

Curtis became a master wagon builder and developed the first mechanical double stake driver, that was later expanded to a triple.

After wrestling canvas for seventeen years, he decided to experiment with a new means of handling the big top. The Floto show at the time used a 160 foot big top with three 50 foot middles.

In 1911 he designed a 27 1/2 foot long canvas spool and mounted it on a wagon. After folding the canvas so it would fit the spool's width, it was secured to the roller and wound up with hand driven winches. The canvas was pulled from the spools by horse teams and spread on the ground. The following year a gasoline engine was added to drive the winch. Two spool wagons handled the big top and a third one was used of the menagerie top. The method saved time getting off the lot and made it easier to spread the canvas when it was going up.

On May 23, 1916 Curtis was issued patent No. 1,184,672 covering a "wagon for circus tents." The patent stated: "An object of the invention is to provide a wagon which obviates the necessity of folding and dragging the canvas upon the ground to be loaded or unloaded from the wagon, thus greatly prolonging the life of the canvas."

The canvas spools proved their worth and were used by the Floto show through the 1928 season.

In 1917 Curtis was lured to the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Upon arrival at the West Baden winter quarters he began construction of three spool wagons. The show received national publicity in an article appearing in the February 9, 1918 issue of *Scientific American* telling about the Curtis canvas wagons. The spool wagons remained in use on Hagenbeck

through the 1923 season. It is not known why they were discontinued on Hagenbeck as they were continued on Sells-Floto, which had been acquired by Muggivan and Bowers. Two new spool wagons were built in 1921 for John Robinson which used them for two or three years.

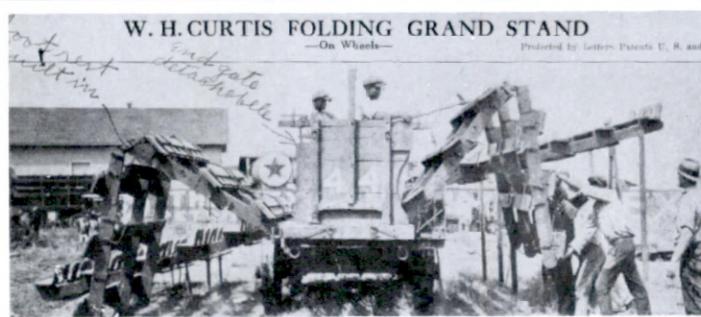
Circus bleachers had been used nearing as long as big tops.

In 1872 David Price patented bleachers with backs and foot rests.

The design of circus seating remained the same until 1903 when James A. Bailey supplied beacher seats with foot rests at no extra charge. The 1904 Barnum & Bailey *Realm* courier book stated: "This new seating feature seems a simple matter, but it necessitates carrying just double the amount of material required for seating arrangements. This extra amount of material requires extra men to handle it, extra horses to haul it and extra cars to transport men, material, horses and wag-

Barnum & Bailey lithograph used in 1904 to advertise the special seating. Circus World Museum collection.





A Hagenbeck-Wallace seat wagon being unfolded at the West Baden quarters.

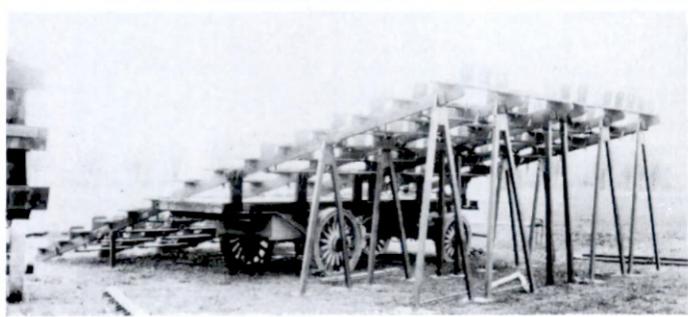
ons." The special bleacher design was discontinued after a year or so, because of the extra cost and time required to set it up.

Curtis' inventive mind turned to circus seating. For years he had been aware of the time and effort required to set up the seats in the big top. He began making sketches of seats that could be folded out of a wagon.

By 1915 he developed the design of a seat wagon to the point of taking it to a patent attorney. The patent application process is a long one. It requires a search of existing patents to make sure the application is clearly new and not covered in any way by an existing patent. On November 24, 1917 he filed an application for a portable seating structure.

The March 23, 1918 *Billboard* published an article about Curtis' invention. It read in part: "The circus more than any other branch of the show business, perhaps, required the greatest concentration of inventive genius if the direction of mechanical construction. Playing, as is its custom, one or two days in a city or town, the problem of transportation had to be met with the fullest measure of study and efficiency. From year to year circus men devoted much thought to the end that their

Six Curtis seat wagons loaded at Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus winter quarters in 1923.



Rear view of a star back seat wagon in West Baden.

arrangement and impress one with its practicability and simplicity of operation.

"Drawing No. 1 is a wagon unit unfolded and ready for the people. The stringers and planks are bolted solidly together, giving the unit a rigidity of construction and making it practically im-

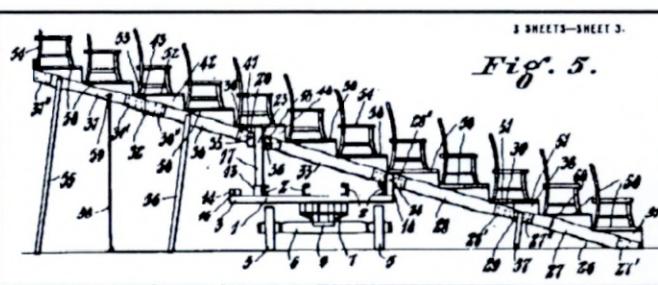
possible for any of the planks to become loosened with the people coming on or going off the seats. Drawing No. 2 is a wagon unit folded up and ready to be loaded with other show stuff of any kind. It has a reattachable front. Drawing No. 5 is an end elevation of the device as shown on drawing No. 1. The plank and stringers directly over the wagon are detachable and can

be removed and laid in the bottom of the wagon. The chairs are then stacked in the center of the wagons, after which the frame is folded up, making the sides of the wagon. The wagons should be made 10 feet in length and should be loaded three to one car. They are all of uniform length, so could be loaded as they come to the train. Inside the tent the wagons should be placed 14 feet apart, a section reaching from one wagon to the other making them continuous. They also have the advantage of shaping themselves up to fit rough or uneven ground.

"The dominant points of Mr. Curtis' invention are two: It saves time, and it does away with any possibility of an accident that could be laid to carelessness on the part of the circus. Full two hours could be saved between towns by employing this device. And the rigidity of construction guarantees safety.

"The wagons would require about the same amount of car space as the old type, and each wagon can haul the few jacks and seat blocks it requires, along with a load of props of some kind. Mr. Curtis' device has a further advantage in that the wagons will be much lighter than the old type, none of them requiring more than six horses to pull.

"The installation of this device will mark an epoch in American circus his-

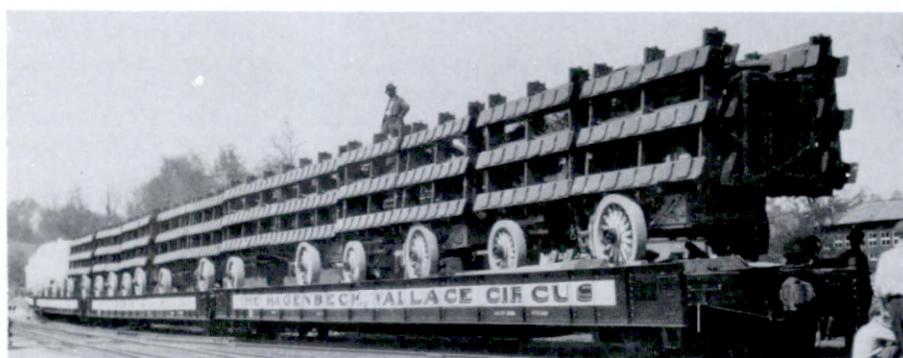


Drawing showing a grandstand chair wagon from the patent issued to Curtis.

"And now, if one may take the word of some of the biggest men in circusdom, their worries are over. The problem has been solved by William H. Curtis, the mechanical genius of the circus world.

"Mr. Curtis, superintendent of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, is a man with over thirty years of practical circus experience behind him, experience dating back to the old days of the wagon show, has invented a seating arrangement that for convenience, type of construction and appearance is all that the progressive circus man has sought for these many years.

"The drawings of Mr. Curtis' system, which give an accurate idea of the ar-





Two Curtis seat wagons and a canvas spool on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1924.

tory. The change will be revolutionary in effect. The saving in time alone will be of immeasurable value. The missing of afternoon performances, now quite common, will, after it has been adopted be a rarity."

Five drawings were reproduced with the article. The drawings were the ones used in the patent application.

On April 22, 1919 Curtis was issued patent number 1,301,107 covering a portable seat structure. The patent read in part, "Be it known that I, William H. Curtis, a citizen of the United States, and a resident of West Baden, in the county of Orange and State of Indiana, have invented certain new and useful improvements in portable seat structures, of which the following is a specification.

"My invention relates to collapsible or folding and portable structures, and more especially to seats such as are used in circuses and other temporary installations.

"The object of my invention is to reduce the amount of labor needed and time consumed in erecting, taking down and transporting seat structures of this character, as well as to reduce the wear and tear thereon, and also render such structures more safe when erected.

"My invention consists in the combination of parts and in the details of construction and arrangement of parts, as will herein after be more fully described and claimed."

The patent contained six drawings of the wagon.

The Curtis Folding Grandstand Company of Kansas City, Missouri was formed and at least two wagons with chairs were constructed. A booklet published by the company pictured two of the units set up on a city street. It is not known if any of these units were sold.

On March 26, 1919 Curtis published a warning notice to anyone who might be thinking about using his seat wagon design: "To the showmen going to use or figuring on using portable seat wagons either reserves or blues, this warning is to inform you that I own a valid patent on this new folding wagon seats. Briefly what I want you to understand is, that I will not allow you to modify my mechanical principal to suit yourself and then

build seats similar to my system for your own use."

In 1921 Curtis convinced Mugivan, Bowers and Ballard the seat wagons should be used on the Hagenbeck show. Eight wagons were built in the West Baden, Indiana winter quarters. Wagon numbers 45, 47, 49 and 51 were thirty feet in length. Wagon numbers 44, 46, 48 and 50 were twenty feet in length. The thirty foot wagons seated 280 people and the twenty foot wagons seated 196 people.

Although one drawing on the Curtis patent showed chairs the Hagenbeck-Wallace wagons were "star backs." These were basically bleachers with small hinged backs. They did have foot rests. The upper portion of the seats on the wagon were supported by two sets of standard jacks. The lower portion reached from the wagon to the ground.

Since the wagons could be spotted, a section with a 112-capacity could be installed between two of the wagons which served as supports. In other words standard planks, stringers and jacks were used in sections between the wagons. So all of the stringer and jack wagons were not eliminated.

Three 72 foot flat cars were required to carry the wagons. The wagons were used through the 1925 season. A cut of five cars from the Hagenbeck-Wallace train in 1926 forced retirement of the seats. The seat wagons were not used on the Sells-Floot or John Robinson shows.

Curtis went to the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1930 and remained there until 1932. In 1933 he worked at the Century of Progress in Chicago. He didn't like the job and returned to Barnes where he re-

mained through the 1939 tour. The Barnes show was augmented by "Ringling Features" in 1938 following the big show's strike in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Curtis continued with the Ringling-Barnum show through the 1942 season. He then joined Cole Bros. in 1943 and stayed until 1947. He was lured back to Ringling by Art Concello in 1948. In 1949 he retired to his pecan farm in Cuevas, Mississippi. His inventive genius continued after leaving show business. He put electricity on his farm by utilizing water from his artesian well long before rural power became a reality.

Curtis was well ahead of his time.

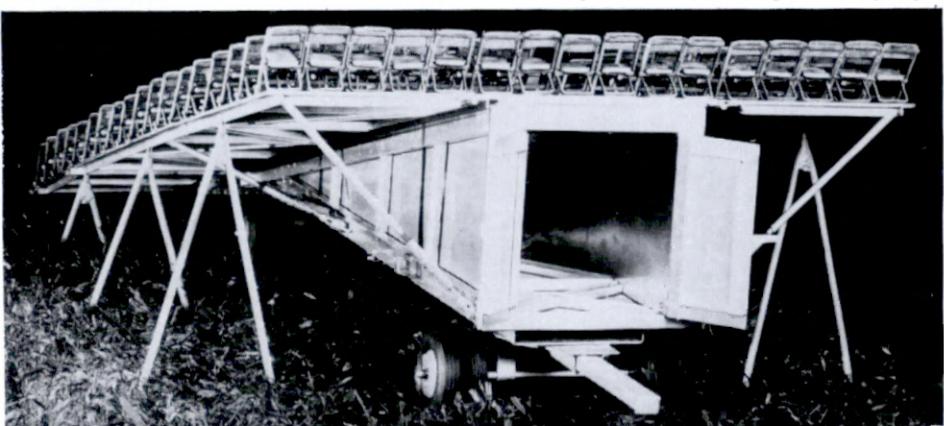
The Ringling-Barnum show did not use canvas spools, preferring to carry the large tents in wagons and later in trucks.

The use of seat wagons was another story. In 1948 eighteen grandstand seat wagons designed by Lester Thomas appeared on the big show. The path leading the wagons to the show had started a few years before when John Ringling North was tossed off his throne in 1943 by his relatives. The two sets of unfriendly relatives each controlled a third of the stock.

North began his lengthy litigious labors to take back control of the show. He was battling the other two factions, each with a third of the stock that had been passed down from two of the five Ringling brothers. James Haley, represented his wife Aubrey Haley, widowed wife of Richard Ringling, [son of Alf. T.] on one side and Richard Ringling, representing his mother Mrs. Charles [Edith] Ringling on the other in his tort tango. Although there was no love lost between Haley and North, they finally found common ground in their dislike for Robert Ringling. North worked out an arrangement with Haley to buy enough of the Aubrey Ringling shares to have 51%. The slow negotiation continued through the summer of 1947.

North needed cash for the stock purchase and had his former manager Art

Model of the Concello seat wagon. The pre-production unit was built from the model by Lewis Diesel Engine Company.





The pre-production wagon in front of the Lewis factory in Memphis, Tennessee. The chairs had not as yet been attached.

Concello in mind as his banker. Arrangements for the loan were made during a meeting between North and Concello when the show played Bloomington, Illinois on August 19, 1947. Part of the deal called for Concello to return as manager and to introduce a new seating system.

During the meeting Concello showed North, then executive vice president and minority shareholder of the big show, a model of his and Lester Thomas' seat wagon.

On October 27, 1947, in Atlanta, Georgia, North regained control after buying additional Haley shares. Concello rounding up the \$194,444.45 needed to acquire the 51%, actually supplying a large part of the money himself. After gaining control of the show North quickly appointed Concello as general manager and announced there would be a new seating system in 1948. North showed his appreciation of Haley by disconnecting Haley's private car from the show train.

Concello was ready when the North call came. Early in 1947 Concello and his associate, and former flyer, Lester Thomas completed the design of a seat wagon that was different than those built by Bill Curtis.

Concello had already been in touch with the Lewis Diesel Engine Company of Memphis, Tennessee about building seat wagons. The company had previously built the new 1947 Jimmy Edgar Sparks Circus wagons. After inspection of that equipment Concello felt Lewis was well qualified to build his seat wagons.

He sent Lester "Little" Thomas to Memphis. Louis Hagan, the Lewis Manufacturing's chief engineer, working with Thomas, and the model, prepared drawings for the construction of the wagons. The mechanical gearing and power drives were designed by Hagan.

On September 13, 1947 E. Womble, Lewis general manager wrote Concello:

"We have gone over the grandstand wagon model and photographs with Mr. Thomas and we are very interested in building this equipment for you.

"We offer the following information for your consideration.

"The wagon based on all steel construction will weigh approximately 20,000 pounds. The construction, including labor and materials will run about \$0.20 per pound. So this is about what the wagon prices will be.

"All steel construction, 20,000 pounds weight at \$0.20 per pound, \$4,000. Hydraulic equipment, tires, wheels and axles, jacks, raising and lowering arms and all items necessary to complete less chairs, \$2,515.

"On the first wagon only, there will be an engineering and drafting charge of \$750, making the total cost of one wagon \$7,265.00

"On each wagon thereafter, the price will drop to \$6,515. With the provision that after the first wagon is built the following wagons are in lots of ten or more, there will be a 5% volume discount from the \$6,515. each."

It should be noted that the original quotation was for a wagon complete, less chairs. Although chairs were installed on

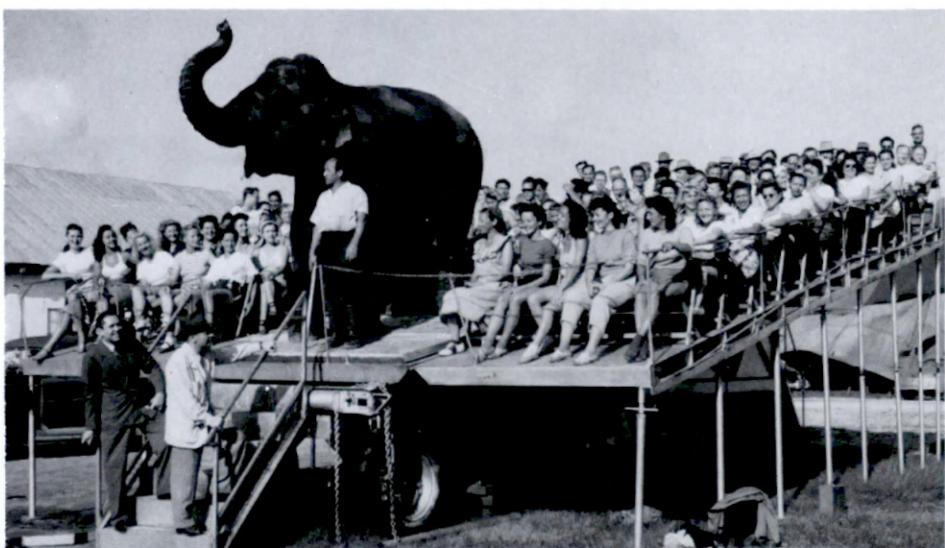
a pre-production unit for testing all other wagons were shipped without chairs, which were made and installed in Sarasota.

Using his operating corporation, Artony Company, Inc., Concello received a formal proposal from Lewis for one portable grandstand wagon on September 30, 1947.

The first unit was to be eight feet wide, 10 feet six inches high and 35 feet overall for transport and 35 feet by 45 feet when set up for service. The dimensions were to be in direct ratio of a model supplied by Concello.

The unit was to be similar to the model, except for changes, additions or eliminations necessary to produce full scale, working and satisfactory equipment. The equipment was to be power controlled through mechanical, hydraulic, or combination of both systems, to raise, lower and otherwise operate with minimum labor.

The pre-production wagon in Sarasota in January 1948. The loose section extending from the front to the ground had not yet been attached. North and Concello are on the steps and Hugo Schmidt is standing on the wagon with Modoc.





The pre-production wagon being set up in Sarasota using power from a Jeep.

The wagon was to be engineered and built to the specifications furnished verbally by Concello to be supplemented, increased or changed by Lewis as deemed necessary for good engineering, public safety and practical operation.

The seating equipment was to be built around a pneumatic tired steel wagon having at least two axles under the rear portion and one axle under the front for a minimum of 11,000 pounds capacity. The wagon was to be equipped with at least twelve first grade truck tires and tubes 8.25 by 20 inches in size. The complete wagon was expected to not exceed 20,000 pounds in weight. The quoted price was \$7,265.00. A down payment of \$2,500 was to be made with the balance due on delivery.

Lewis noted that it was understood by both parties that the unit was to be considered a pre-production unit. Upon completion and observation on demonstration Lewis offered a contract for ten or more units of the same design and construction at a net price of \$6,188 each payable 25% with order and balance over a period of time to be decided later.

Concello accepted the Lewis proposal on October 2 and forwarded a bank draft for \$2,500. He noted that it was necessary to have the pre-production wagon in Sarasota as soon as the show closed the 1947 tour.

Lewis acknowledged receipt of the contract and advised that they had just about completed the necessary engineering.

Sam Vinson, former sales manager of Lewis Diesel, in a phone interview on May 15, 1994, provided information on the company and their dealings with Concello. Lewis' main activity was selling and servicing GMC diesel engines. A manufacturing subsidiary, Lewis Manufacturing Company, was established to build trailer units to house electric generators powered by diesel engines.

The 20,000 square foot Lewis factory

was located on Carolina Street in Memphis. In 1946 Lewis built a generator wagon for Dailey Bros. Circus. During the winter of 1946-1947 Lewis received the largest order in their history, building all of the wagons for the Sparks Circus.

After receiving an order for the pre-production unit engineering was completed and construction

was started. Les Thomas remained in Memphis and worked with Hagan during the building of the first unit. Mr. Vinson said there was a lot of trial and error and design changes as the work progressed. He commented that the placement of the chairs was a serious problem and that they were attached three times before working properly.

Vinson stated there was considerable discussion between Womble, Walker Lewis, president, and himself regarding the price quoted to Concello. The relatively small company was concerned about the financial exposure, should the quotation be low. But they held to their quotation and after completing all of the wagons the company did not lose any money. But they didn't make much profit either. The pre-production unit was erected and taken down three times before being transported by lowboy truck to Sarasota.

On November 19, 1947 an article appeared in the Miami *Herald* reading in part: "Big top to have steel stands, cushion seats.

"Circus patrons hereafter will sit on portable steel grandstands on chairs with sponge rubber cushions and back rests, John Ringling North, new president and majority stockholder of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus announced Tuesday.

"North, who on Saturday assumed control of the big show—the first time any individual has owned a majority of the stock since the Ringlings started in the circus business 63 years ago last spring—said the new grandstand is only one of the many innovations he plans for the future.

"He said the first unit of the new portable grandstand, made of tubular steel, will be ready in the Sarasota winter quarters within two weeks and the entire project will be completed before the show goes north in April.

"The sections are 22 tiers high and 14 seats wide, invented by Art Concello, new general manager of the circus, they are called the Artony portable grandstand and North said sections are now being built and assembled."

The November 29, 1947 *Billboard* reported: "John Ringling North announced last Saturday (15) several planned major changes in the physical set-up of the Big One. Included are portable tubular steel grandstands in sections, the shortening of the big top by about 100 feet, which will be added to its width, and the use again of mechanical air conditioning units which were discarded following the 1942 season."

The December 6, 1947 *Billboard* further reported on the new seating system: "The new portable grandstand seats for Ringling-Barnum are being manufactured in Memphis. The Lewis Manufacturing Company, selling through the Lewis Diesel Engine Company, is building the equipment, according to Fred Miller, vice-president and general manager.

"The portable element comes in a wagon-like steel frame and there will be 250 seats on each wagon," Miller said. He said his company expected to complete the first (of) 28 such wagons in the next 45 days. "It will go to Sarasota for final approval before we complete the order," Miller said."

The first unit was shipped by truck to Sarasota early in December and was found to be acceptable. Seventeen additional grandstand wagons were ordered by the show. Upon completion of the additional wagons the show sent flat cars to Memphis to pick up them up.

The Concello wagons differed in design

Rear view of the pre-production wagon showing hinged top of center floor section.



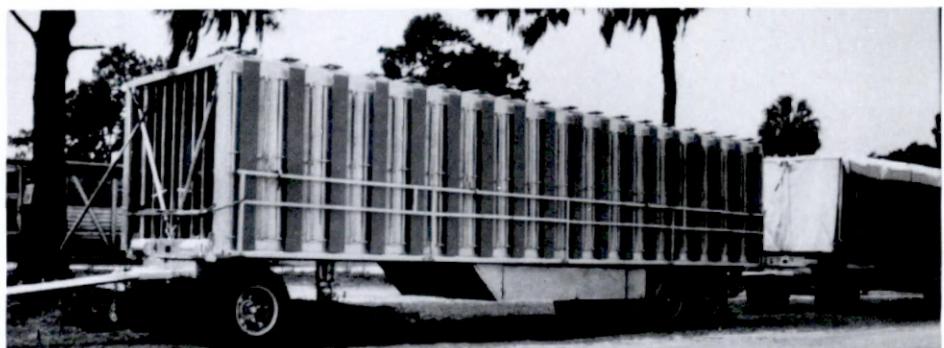
from the Curtis originals. The Curtis units were spotted parallel to the sidewall and the seats folded out over the sides. The Concello wagons were parked at right angles to the sidewall and the slope was from back to front.

The basic design of the 35 by 7 feet seat wagons was a wedge standing from a height of ten feet six inches at the back to bed level at the front. The wedged portion of the wagon was enclosed with sheet metal sides, with two hinged doors at the rear. There were three sections of flooring. The center section had a wing of equal size on either side. The center section was hinged at the back, with each 7 foot 2 inch side section, or wing, hinged to the center section. When folded for movement the front of the center section was raised to the same level as the back and supported by corner posts, allowing the side sections to be level with the ground.

A February 24, 1956 Leon Pickett drawing described the simplified operation: "The wings are hinged to the main deck and the main deck is hinged to the main body. The wing lifting mechanism raises the wings from a vertical to a horizontal position. The deck lifting mechanism lowers the main deck and wings from a horizontal position until the deck rests on the main body. This operation forms a sloping surface entirely supported by the main frame of the wagon and the four wing jacks. The wagon is folded up by reversing the process."

The wagons were spotted with the front to the inside of the big top. Jacks on the back corners and behind the front wheels of the wagon were extended to the ground for leveling and additional support. The wings were raised half way out and the front of the main deck was lowered to bed level. Two Jeeps with power takeoffs were used to raise the wings, using a jack shaft and gears located on each side of the wagon. The front of the main deck section was then lowered by another

Drawing from the patent issued to Cencello.



Two folded bleacher seat wagons in winter quarters early in 1949.

jack shaft that was connected to a set of gears located in the possum belly. The gears were connected by a roller chain.

The wings were then extended out to the full width and eight support posts were placed at the ends of the side sections. Guard rails were placed at the ends of the side sections.

A separate fourth loose section was added to each wagon, consisting of stringers and flooring with chairs. This was then attached to the front of the wagon extending the three sections to the ground. Short jacks were placed under the front part. The flooring had the chairs attached. The chairs were then unfolded to the seating position.

The loose front section parts were loaded in the front of the wagon bed. Other loose parts were stored inside the wagon and in a possum belly located near the rear wheels.

Stairs extending from the back of the erected wagons to the ground were provided with each wagon. Originally designed for safety use, they were used in only some cities where they were required by fire safety codes.

Eighteen seat wagons were built for the 1948 season. All were identical with twenty-two rows of fourteen seats. The chairs were painted blue with red upholstered seats.

One of the wagons accommodated the band on eight rows of the loose section

extending to the ground. This wagon had thirteen rows of seats in back of the band. The odd wagon was placed in the middle on the back side. It was used in this configuration only in 1948.

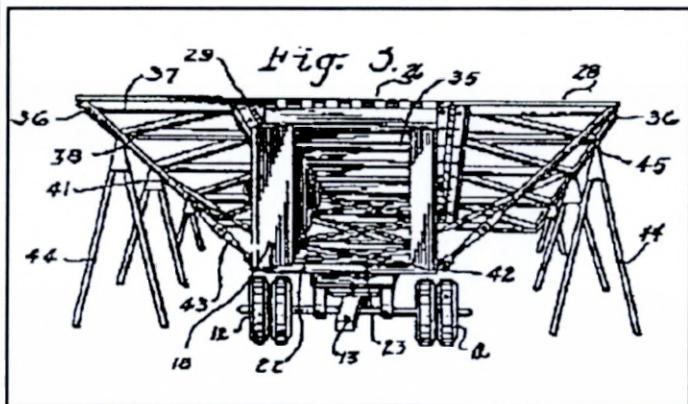
Concello moved quickly to secure a patent covering his portable seating structures. Attorney Jerome W. Paxton, as agent for Concello, filed for a patent on December 3, 1947. Patent No. 2,635,889 was granted on April 21, 1953. The patent contained six drawings and allowed eleven claims. The patent read in part: "The present invention relates to seating arrangements, and more particularly has reference to a portable, collapsible platform structure finding the special use for supporting seats for circuses and other similar performances.

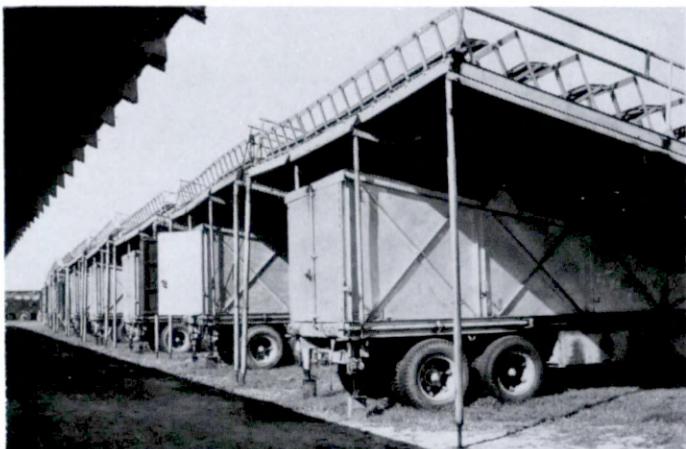
"An object of my invention is to provide a seating structure wherein the supporting surface includes means for detachably connecting a chair or the like thereto.

"A further object of my invention is to provide a portable collapsible seating structure forming an integral part of a mobile trailer which is simple in structural detail, positive in operation and which can be relatively inexpensively manufactured.

"The invention broadly includes a wheeled frame, the sides, top and one end of which are adapted to form the sup-

The loose section stringers from wagon to ground at front of wagon. Albert Conover collection.



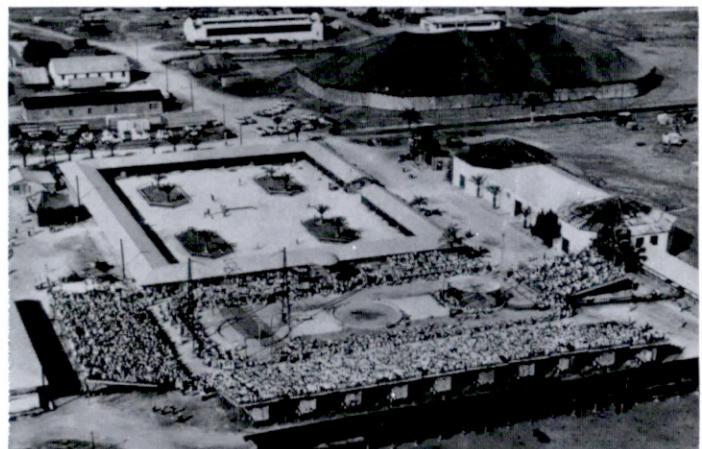


Modified grandstand wagons set up around Little Madison Square Garden in the spring of 1949.

porting surface for the seats. The sides of the vehicle are hinge mounted to the top, and the top in turn is pivotally connected to the front supports of the vehicle. The opposite or rear end of the vehicle is hinged to supporting beams which extend downwardly from the upper front end of the frame to a position adjacent the real supporting wheels. When it is desired to erect or set up the seating structure, the rear closure is opened and the side members are moved upwardly about to the point of pivoting to the top closure. This enables the top closure to be moved downwardly until it connects the inclined support which is at such an angle as to provide excellent vision for the seats which are secured thereto. Suitable supporting struts or the like are then attached to the respective side walls to hold such side walls in proper alignment with respect to the top wall. The chairs are then securely fastened to lugs provided on the exposed surface of the supporting structure."

The Thomas model was the same design shown in the patent drawings. A number of design modifications were made during the preparation of engineering drawings by Lewis Diesel. The most significant design detail was changing the incline from the front of the wagon to the back. The model and the patent drawings showed the the extension from the wagon bed to the ground at the back of the wagon. After determining the weight of the wagon double axles were placed on the rear of the wagon. The patent did not reference any gearing or power drives to extent the winged flooring sections. The mechanics of the Jeep power drives was designed by Lewis Hagen. This was of vital importance as it was the principal labor saving feature of the wagons.

After eighteen seat wagons arrived in



Packed seat wagons at Little Madison Square Garden on a Sunday afternoon.

Sarasota the power drives were changed from the front to the back.

On January 2, 1948 an agreement was signed between Ringling Bros. & Bailey Combined Shows, Inc. and the Artony Company of Bloomington, Illinois. Artony agreed to sell the circus twenty-eight portable, automatic grandstand seat wagons, consisting of 16 units to contain grandstand chairs seating 4,592 persons and 12 units to contain general admission seats seating 4,224 persons. One of the units had already been manufactured and delivered to the circus as an experimental unit by Lewis Diesel Engine Company.

The other 27 units, to be manufactured in accordance with the specifications of the experimental unit, would be ordered by Artony from the manufacturer for delivery to the circus at Sarasota, Florida, not later than May 1, 1948, it being understood and agreed that said delivery date is guaranteed and that the time of de-

Two circus inventors, Arthur M. Concello and William H. Curtis.



livery is of essence of the agreement. The manufacturer's price for the experimental unit is \$7,265, \$2,500 of which has already been paid to the manufacturer by Artony. The balance was to be billed to the circus and paid by the circus. Artony was to be reimbursed by the circus on or before May 15, 1948 for the deposit advanced by them.

For a period of ten years from date of delivery of twenty-eight units, Artony agreed to supervise the use of the units in operation of the circus, supervise the erection, dismantling and handling of the grandstand, chairs, and seats during the circus performance and to act in an advisory capacity concerning repairs, alterations and changes for the improving the operating efficiency of said units. The circus agreed to pay Artony, as compensation for such services, the sum of \$20,000 per year for each of said ten years.

The lease agreement was a ploy for paying Concello back the money he had loaned North to regain control of the show in the fall of 1947. In essence the loan was paid by the show and not out of North's pocket. Ringling 49er Hester Ringling Sanford, Edith's daughter, protested the use of circus funds to pay off a personal debt in a mismanagement suit against North in 1957.

In January of 1948 Concello brought Bill Curtis, at age seventy-five, back to Ringling as superintendent of big top canvas. Curtis handled only the canvas. Lester Thomas was superintendent of seats.

There has been conjecture that Curtis played a roll in the design of the Concello seat wagons, but this is not true. Concello stated he had never seen a Curtis wagon.

After leaving the Ringling show Curtis was critical of the Concello design. In a October 11, 1949 letter to George Chindahl Curtis wrote: "Concello and the firm at Memphis did not know anything about circus seats. My [seat] wagons had

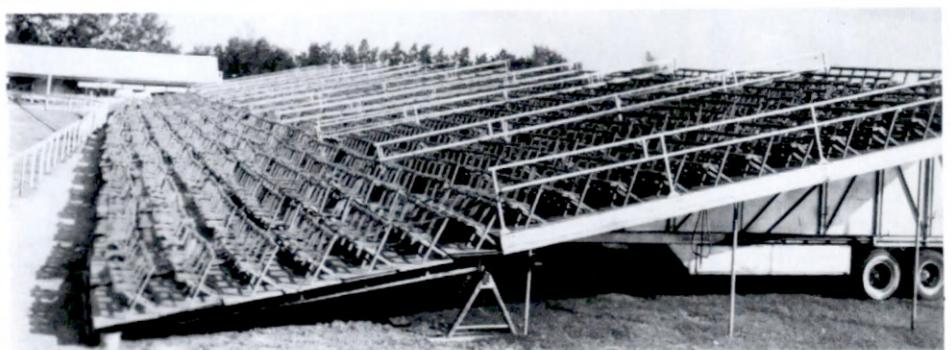
the correct elevation so the people could see the ground acts. His seats were too flat, the people had to stand up to see the low acts all season of 1948. I could see the mistakes he made. My wagons were placed length ways along the side wall and parked about ten feet apart. I had two I beams with swivel braces to make a good line up of the wagons. My wagons held  $1\frac{1}{2}$  section of chairs.

"The Concello wagons were made to be backed in to the side wall and on soft lots it was very hard to and on some lots it can't be done. Last fall at Montgomery, Alabama the lot was soft and they could not show. My wagons could have made the lot fine. In 1948 they had nine wagons on each side as grandstand, a total of 18 thirty-five foot wagons. I could have given them the same capacity on ten wagons by facing the center between the wagons. A saving of eight wagons and four flat cars."

Curtis was not correct about the success of the Concello wagons. His wagons carried no loads, Concello's did, saving baggage wagons used for trunks, rigging and props. The empty seat wagon shells carried loads and were utilized on the lot as dressing rooms for the feature acts. The ballet girls and clowns dressed in curtained off space between the wagons. This eliminated some of the customary dressing tents.

There may have been a bit of professional jealousy on Curtis' part. The angle of the seating was corrected before the 1949 season. The slope was changed by placing an axis roller on each side on the top eight feet from the back. This raised the back of all sections about two feet above the top of the enclosed section and

Photo showing axis point added after the 1948 season to change angle of seat slope. Albert Conover collection.



allowed a better angle of vision.

This change raised the height of the erected wagons and required longer side poles and higher sidewall canvas.

The amount of labor saved over the old style of seating is unknown, but it had to have been significant. It was suggested by management that the seat wagons required only fourteen men as opposed to 250 to set up and the time was cut from two and one half hours to one.

The mechanical power used in erecting the wagons was a savings but chairs still had to be set up by hand. The job of handling the chairs had traditionally been part of the ushers' duties and they continued to flip the chairs into place. At least the ushers were saved the labor of handling them in and out of chair wagons.

The ushers income was directly affected with the fixed chairs. They no longer had the extra chairs to pull from the ground under the bibles and sell with the money going into their pocket. Their nimble minds went to work to find new ways for the private sale of seats. Working with the sellers in the ticket wagons the first two rows were sometimes blocked off. The "saved" chairs were then sold by the ushers, as had long been a tradition in the circus.

Although hard to believe, at one time whole sections of reserve seat tickets were set aside and not sold in the ticket wagon. The tickets taken from the customers were re-hashed and again sold for seating in the "set-aside-section." This scam was related in Michael Burke's book *Outrageous Good Fortune*.

The March 27, 1948 *Billboard* told of the introduction of seat wagons to the show. The article read in part: "When Ringling-Barnum takes to



The loose front section being loaded into a wagon during tear down. Howard Tibbals collection.

ida have attested to the efficacy of the new system.

The seating system literally carries itself around on specially constructed wagons. The seats are built around wagons and fold into the sides and top. When the location for the big top is selected the new arrangement will find the big top more of a circle than oval, but will still hold the same seating capacity.

The wagons will be moved into position and the seats erected. A power motor quickly raises the seats and places them in position. The time of erecting the seats is expected to be reduced from three or four hours to slightly over an hour.

"But this is only part of the revolutionary changes that are effected by the new set-up. The wagons that carry the seats on their extension are completely utilized in their interiors. There is a vast amount of space in the 28 wagons and this space is loaded with equipment. The space under the seats after being erected-



The 1949 bleacher seat wagons in the Sarasota quarters in 1958. Albert Conover collection.

is converted into compartmental sections.

"The space is utilized for dressing rooms and does away with carrying dressing top canvas.

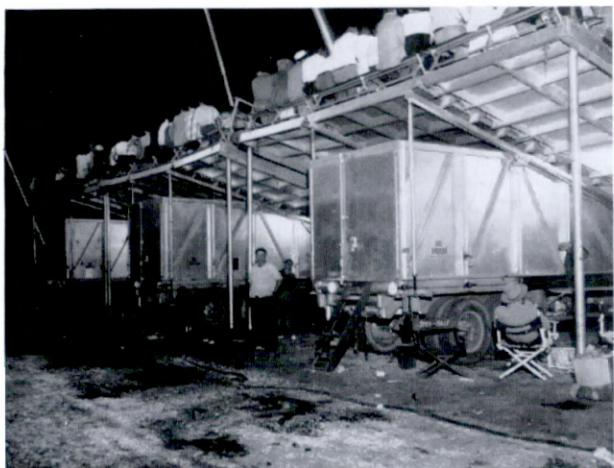
"Eighteen wagons provide grandstand seating and eleven are for blues. The grandstand wagons carry 308 seats and the blues 325."

This report was not correct. Only eighteen grandstand wagons were delivered. The standard bleachers were used on either end for general admission customers in 1948.

*Steelways* magazine published an article that was reprinted in the 1948 Ringling-Barnum route book. It read in part: "Concello put the seating unit on blue prints, solved every engineering problem and built the first one himself. He holds the patent and heads the company that manufacturers it.

"The seats of the portable grandstand are literally built around the duel-wheeled steel wagons used to transport it, folding flat and into the sides and tops.

Three bleacher seat wagons under the big top. The axis point on these was different than the modified wagons.



Steel safety stairways are a part of the package.

"Units for the complete portable structure seats 10,000 people and cost nearly \$250,000. The brain child has made so-called impossible railroad jumps practical and has radically changed the circus operation.

"As the show moves into a town the big top goes up first, with its sides bare. The seating units are towed into place at uniform intervals inside the perimeter of the tent. Each wagon is pointed inward."

The 1948 wagons were numbered 48-1 to 48-18. The seat wagons carried loads that had previously required separate wagons. The contents were: No. 1, ring curbs; No. 2, #4 Jeep; No. 3, trunks; No. 4, chair parts; No. 5, chair parts; No. 6, seat erection Jeep; No. 7, trunks and supplies; No. 8, trunks and supplies; No. 9, air compressor Jeep; No. 10, trunks; No. 11, trunks; No. 12, trunks; No. 13, trunks; No. 14, electrical cable and lighting standards; No. 15, equipment; No. 16, trunks; No. 17, trunks; and No. 18, Doctor's wagon and first aid station. The loose front section was also loaded in each wagon.

The No. 14 wagon was so heavy with the electrical equipment that it sometime blew the tires when running over the gunnels on the flats. Steel plates about three inches less than tire radius were bolted to the rear wheels. The edge of the plate supported the wheel if a tire blew.

Whitey Versteeg, chief electrician at the time, reported that special hard rubber tires were made by Firestone to support the No. 14 seat wagon. The solid tires were molded to match the pneumatic ones.

The May 29, 1948 *Billboard* reported on the opening under canvas in Washington, D. C. Part of the article read: "Principal innovation was the first time use of new mobile grandstands as devised by Arthur M. Concello, general man-

ager. The eighteen compact units are divided between the side areas, with blues still being used for end area seating. Steps in the rear of each grandstand leading outside the tent under the side wall apparently eliminate the need for other narrow aisles for access from the track.

"The seats, cushioned with sponge rubber, are bolted to sheet metal flooring to provide safe, comfortable accommodations. The first row of seats is placed on the ground, followed by a portable section of some five rows before the grandstand proper is reached.

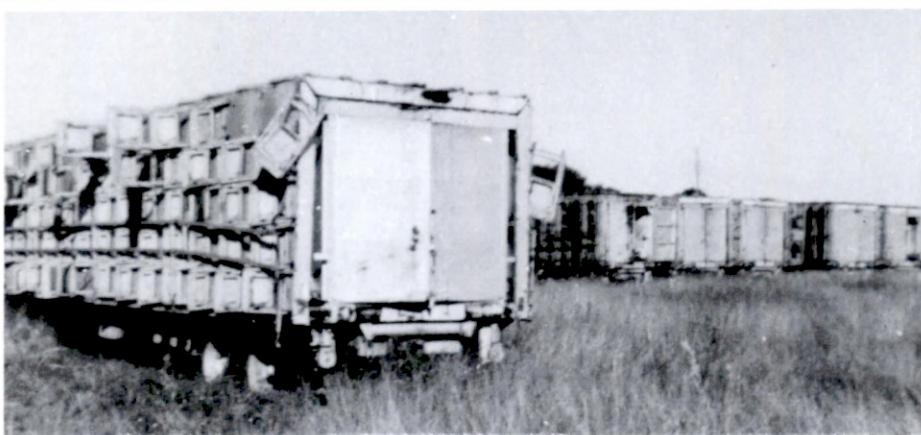
"Although the practicality of the new units will have to undergo more rigorous proving than they were put to here, indications are that they will aid the mobility of the show considerably, as well as create a favorable impression with patrons. There was no evidence to substantiate advance reports that the pitch of the stands was inadequate, as the audience was obviously pleased.

"The new big top was widened to accommodate the depth of the new grandstands. However, the show is more compact, as the interiors of the wagons supporting the grandstands are used as dressing rooms, thus eliminating the former tops used for this purpose, other than a half dozen small units used by as many acts. The wagons proved entirely adequate for this purpose during the temperate weather while prevailed here. They might prove tough quarters when the weather gets hot but they have an appealing feature in that they will always be high and dry."

The mechanical seat wagons worked well, but major changes were made by a crew from Lewis who came to Sarasota in early January 1949. The angle of the floor slope was corrected. An axis point eight feet from the back, allowed a steeper angle of the flooring. This required removing the hinge back of the center deck section and moving it eight feet to the forward where it rested on the axis point. This allowed unobstructed viewing by customers, but necessitated an additional operation during setup.

However, because the chairs were of modest size and the rows were placed close together there were complaints about a lack of leg room. Long leg patrons felt cramped. The slanting floor also did not provide a level place for show goer's feet. The seat wagons did not provide the comfort of the former grandstand bibles with level floors. Short folks like Concello did not notice the discomfort. But there were few complaints.

Jim Baker, a member of the train crew in 1948, remembers the two-ton, thirty-five foot, seat wagons required special treatment. The flat car runs needed extra room



Seat wagons in disrepair in Sarasota in the spring of 1959.

as the long wagons came off. They were treated carefully, being pulled down the cars one at a time. The wagons were pulled to the lot by tractors two at a time. On a couple of occasions the weight of a seat wagon broke water lines connected to fire plugs.

There were no accidents involving the wagons other than the front section of one unit which came loose and dropped to the ground in Syracuse, New York, causing minor injury to three show goers.

A couple of seat wagons were sent to Washington, D. C. for the January 20, 1949 inaugural parade for Harry Truman. The wagons had been requested by Melvin Hildreth, circus fan and chairman of the inaugural committee. The grandstand seat wagons were set up around "Little Madison Square Garden" in quarters for the comfort of visitors viewing rehearsals in the spring of 1949. Two of the wagons were rented to the Boston Red Sox for baseball fans to view the spring training in Sarasota. In 1953 all twenty-eight seat wagons were sent to McDill Air Force base near Tampa to view a stock car race. These were the only known uses of the wagons other than on the show.

On December 6, 1948 two additional grandstand seat wagons at \$6,800 each and eight general admission wagons at \$6,500 each were ordered from Lewis for the 1949 season. The 1949 wagons replaced the old style conventional blues. The basic bleacher wagon design was the same as the 1948 wagons, with the flooring angle modifications, except that plank seats were used rather than chairs.

The two additional grandstand wagons allowed ten on each side of the tent. The 1948 seat wagon that had been used partially as a bandstand was used as patron seating in 1949. A new three tiered bandstand wagon was built for the 1949 tour.

Lewis made a new set of drawings for the second order. These had a different

design of the axis point on the center deck. The decks of new grandstand and bleacher wagons were of the same design.

The eight additional 34 1/2 foot bleacher wagons were spotted in rows of four at each end of the tent, rather than in a semi-circle as in the past.

The 1949 bleacher wagons were numbered 19 to 28. Their loads consisted of: No. 19, Trunks; No. 20, trunks; No. 21, trunks; No. 22 trunks and supplies; No. 23 trunks and rigging; No. 24, rigging and props; No. 25, trunks and No. 25, trunks and props and No. 26, trunks, with seven dogs in a possum belly.

With the success of the wagons on the circus it was hoped that additional wagons could be sold for other uses. Following the *Billboard* references to the seating system inquiries arrived from circuses in other parts of the world and for use in buildings requiring movable seats.

Interest had been expressed by the District of Columbia Armory and by the city of Coral Gables, Florida, who wanted to use them for viewing the Orange Bowl parade. Sam Vinson said no wagons were sold to anyone other than the circus.

However there was serious interest from the Wirth Bros. Circus in Australia. Wayne Larey, a Concello flyer, had joined the Wirth show in 1939. Larey stayed current with American circus activities. In the early 1950s the Wirth's introduced American style seat wagons to their Australia audiences.

An article in the 1952 Wirth program stated: "Portable circus grandstand. Its on wheels, it loads as a truck, it unfolds like an extension bridge platform, it grows chairs, it absolutely revolutionizes circus seating.

The latest innovation Wirths have added to the circus is the portable grandstand seating section.

"In post-war years Wirths have greatly improved both the circus itself in regard to artists and the 'behind-the-scenes' equipment of the show.

"Modern motor tractors are gradually replacing the elephants in moving transport wagons. A special tractor that will drive iron and wooden stakes into the ground, pull them out after the show is over, will lift sections of the huge canvas onto wagons, and is in constant demand for lifting bulky and heavy gear, is one of the many innovations introduced during the last few years.

"And so after 72 years of Australian circus supremacy Wirths, impressed with an idea submitted by Wayne Larey (an American), tested this near miracle of structural seating in the big top.

"Its amazing radical alteration in circus operation has speeded up both erection and dismantling of seating sections, making for faster and easier handling of seating accommodation.

"Streamlined steel trucks are towed in by tractor and spotted at exact intervals, just inside the tent. Each carefully aligned and pointed radially inward.

"Tractors supply the power to drive crank shafts and the trucks unfold deck-like at grandstand pitch and precise adjustments are made. As it unfolds it resembles a baby aircraft carrier.

"From the high ridge of the stands men start snapping upright the chairs. Soon this great grandstand is beautified by comfortable chairs, in colorings of red, white and blue. Wirths' Circus holds the patent rights of this modern mobile seating, which cost 6,500 Pounds in the ex-

Four seat wagons on the Wirth Bros. Circus train in Australia. Jim Fogarty collection.



perimental stage. Four units have been constructed at a cost of 2,500 pounds each, and are being used on the show. Similar units are under construction and on completion will go into service immediately.

"Having had the blueprints drafted, and charting every engineering problem, Wayne Larey arranged for the construction of these mobile seating wagons by the Lincoln Engineering Company of Melbourne."

Photos of the seat wagons in the Wirth program show units very similar to the Concello-Thomas design. Any arrangement between the Wirths and Concello is unknown.

A short reference in *The Silver Road: The Life of Mervyn King, Circus Man*, by Mark St. Leon states: "Most of the key people who had once run Wirth's were no longer around after the war. A couple of Americans came out to try and run the show for the Wirths. Didn't they make a mess of it! They tried to introduce American ideas to the show, but this is Australia. For the haulage of the circus, they done away with the elephants and replaced them with tractors. It was an all day put-up and a damn-near all night pull-down. The Americans brought out this iron seating wagon thing that was no good. Our railways were too small for them. They cost the Wirths a fortune. They finished up just bulldozed into the ground." So much for one man's view.

Ringling again used twenty-eight seat wagons in 1950. From 1951 through 1954 two grandstand chair wagons were left in quarters, with only twenty-six wagons being used on the show. This was caused by the menagerie being placed inside the big top. The elephants, hippo, gorilla, giraffes and ten short cages (ex-army ammunition wagons) were spotted just inside the marquee.

One or two seat wagons were sent to Hollywood in 1951 for additional studio scenes in *The Greatest Show on Earth*. The scene of Jimmy Stewart as a clown talking to his mother, who was in the seats, was filmed in California. One seat wagon remained on Cecil B. DeMille's ranch for a period of time. The California wagons were returned before the 1955 season.

In 1955 and 1956 twenty grandstand and eight bleacher wagons were again used.

Following the closing of the tent show in 1956 Ringling-Barnum began disposing of their tents, wagons and rail cars. In 1959 they offered the twenty-eight seat wagons for \$100,000.

After the quarters were closed in Sarasota a number of the remaining wagons were moved to Venice. Those not moved

went to the Sarasota Salvage and Iron Company [Goodman junk yard] on 17th Street. Most of the seat wagons were moved to Venice.

The November 10, 1960 *Venice Gondolier* quoted Bill Perry: "The patented seats contained in the seat wagons will be used in the new arena building. The wagons will be refurbished and put to good use."

Circus Enterprises, operated by Bill Perry and Jack Goodman, served as sales agent for Ringling show equipment. On June 12, 1961 the show sold them an extensive lot that included fourteen flat cars; seven stock cars; a number of baggage wagon and ten grandstand seat wagons. Some this property was then in turn sold to Sol Walker, a Tampa, Florida scrap iron dealer. Walker was told to select the ten best seat wagons. Little difference, he was going to cut them up in any case and had no intention of reselling them.

An article in the August 10, 1961 *Venice Gondolier* told of circus equipment that had been moved to Venice. The city had received complaints about Ringling equipment littering the quarters area. Bill Perry was quoted at length, saying a decision was to be made shortly about whether to store the equipment or dispose of it.

Perry said: "Most of the vehicles on the circus grounds not already under cover are portable seat wagons which may be used, after they are refurbished as temporary stands inside the giant auditorium that is now nearing completion. Originally there were 28 such wagons, but 10 have been disposed of. The replacement value of the 28 wagons would be in the neighborhood of \$200,000." The show later found the chairs unsuitable for the building.

In November 1961 Walker bought ten more seat wagons at \$500 each. He later bought five more at \$200 each. Rather than move the wagons from Venice to

One of the two remaining stripped down Ringling wagons that remain in Punta Gorda, Florida. Jim Caldwell photo.

Tampa. Walker had them cut up in Venice. On March 19, 1962 welders were cutting up the seat wagons when sparks from their torches set the grass around the wagons on fire. About a dozen baggage wagons were lost. The fire did not effect the seat wagons as it merely burned away any material other than the steel, it was no loss to Walker. Three remaining seat wagons remained in Venice. One later found its way back to the Goodman junk yard.

In 1968 the show was bought by the Felds and Roy Hofheinz, an owner of the Houston Astrodome and Astroworld amusement park. Astroworld planned a circus theme area. Wagons No. 3, cookhouse range; No. 4, refrigerator and supplies; No. 7, cookhouse ranges; No. 31, animal act arenas; No. 125, Male performers wardrobe; No. 141, wardrobe trunks; No. 142, spec equipment; No. 143, wardrobe-trunks; and one seat wagon were sent to Astroworld where they were displayed. These wagons were later placed in a scrap yard near the Astrodome where they remained as late as 1981, but have since been removed.

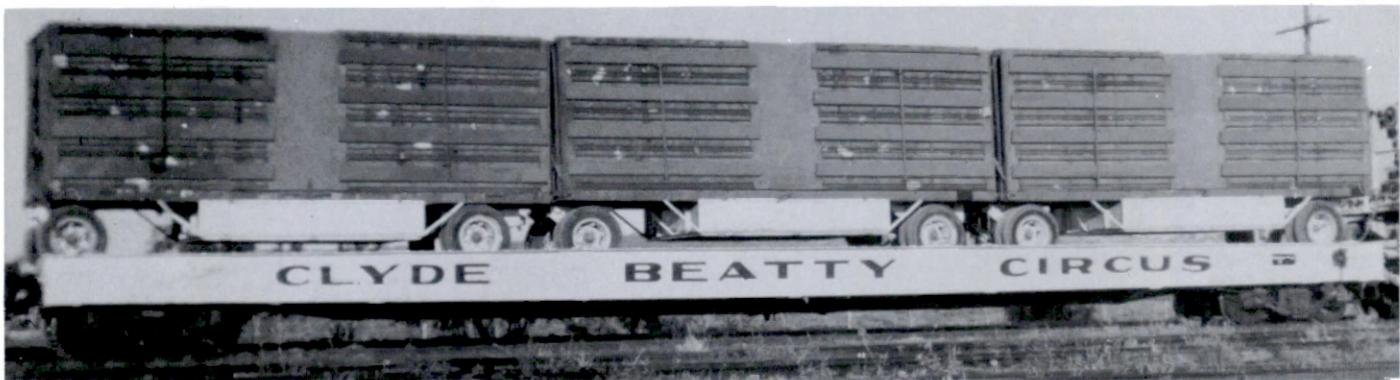
The No. 125 and No. 4 wagons as well as the seat wagon had been parked at the Ringling Museum of the Circus in Sarasota before being sent to Houston.

Ringling wagon historian Jim Caldwell reports that two seat wagons found their way to Punta Gorda, Florida. When last viewed in 1991 they were in a stripped down condition. One was cut to the bed and the other still had the wedge shaped enclosure but no center or side floor sections.

Various truck circuses had used seat wagons earlier. In 1946 Hunt Bros. Circus began testing a seat wagon built on a semi-trailer. The unit had the seats angled over the side of the trailer, using the basic Curtis design.

During this period D. R. Miller was also experimenting with seat wagons. In 1947 Miller had four seat trailers built by Wayne Sanquin in his Hugo, Oklahoma machine shop.





Three of the five Clyde Beatty Circus bleacher seat wagons in 1956. Doyle Davis photo.

Art Concello controlled the Clyde Beatty rail show for a brief time. During the winter of 1954-1955 he sent five Beatty wagons to Memphis where the Lewis firm equipped them with bleacher seats. Concello changed the design of these wagons from those he brought to the Ringling show. Although they looked similar when folded, they were much lighter in weight, and folded out from one side with most of the seats extending from the back side of the wagon to the ground. The bleacher benches folded up the same as the Ringling wagons. The Beatty seat wagons had large possum bellies to carry the supports to the ground and had single dual wheels front and back. The wagons carried bibles, jacks and chairs, but because of their design could not be used a dressing areas. The seat wagons were used on the Beatty rail show in 1955 and 1956. They were converted to semi-trailers when the show went to trucks for the 1957 tour and were so used until they wore out. Two of the converted Beatty semi-trailer seat wagons are now at the Circus World Museum.

Mills Bros. had seat trailers built in Cleveland, Ohio in 1957. Other truck shows followed. By 1960 the Mills show used seven seat semi-trailers. Today nearly every truck show uses seat wagons.

Canvas spools are also now standard equipment on truck shows. Introduced in 1946, their use was adopted quickly. By 1951 seven motorized circuses rolled their big tops on spools to give the system its most widespread use. The spools being used at the time were designed by Kelly Miller and Wayne Sanguin, a Hugo, Okla homa machine shop operator, for use on the Kelly-Miller circus in 1946.

On December 13, 1949 Wayne C. Sanguin and Kelly

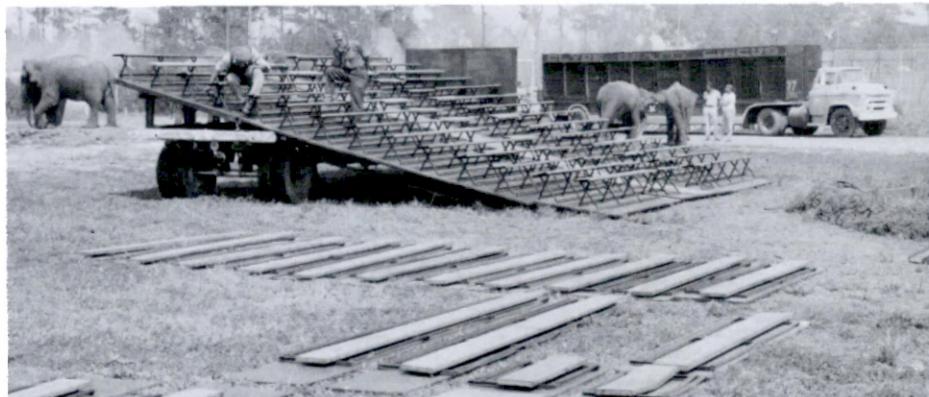
H. Miller applied for a patent on their truck canvas spool. Patent No. 2,536,571 was issued to them on January 2, 1951. Their claims covered the gear drives from the truck engine.

The Hugo spools were unlike the original Curtis units. The spools were mounted crosswise on straight trucks, with the spools being the width of the truck. The canvas was rolled up using a motor as the truck backed up. The truck moved for-

Sanguin company was later succeeded by the McCleary Machine Shop in Hugo, which built canvas spools, seat trucks and stake drivers.

Bill Curtis, who died April 9, 1955, left his mark on the mechanization of the circus. His contributions live on.

Lewis Hagan later bought the Lewis Manufacturing Company and changed the name to Hagan Manufacturing. He is no longer alive.



ward to unload the canvas. Stevens Bros. and Cole & Walters were also early users the Miller-Sanguin spools. By 1951 Beatty-Cole, Wallace & Clark, Campa Bros., Cristiani Bros. and King Bros. also used the Hugo spools. Today nearly every motorized circus uses a canvas spool, basically of the Miller-Sanguin design. The

The first Kelly-Miller canvas spool truck in 1957.



A Beatty seat wagon converted to a semi-trailer in the DeLand, Florida quarters in the spring of 1957.

Sam Vinson later bought the Lewis Diesel Engine Company and changed the name to VICO GMC Diesel Engine Company. Vinson is now retired.

Arthur Concello, trapeze performer, circus manager, extravariare and inventor, is alive and well living in Sarasota, Florida.

Special appreciation to Arthur M. Concello who responded to some specific questions. Additional help came from the Circus World Museum, Tom Parkinson collection, Albert Conover, Ken Humphreys, George Grisom, Robert MacDougall, Howard Tibbals, Jim Caldwell, Jim Baker, Tex Copeland, Jim Fogarty, Richard Reynolds and Sam Vinson.

# BIG APPLE CIRCUS

Grandma <sup>MEETS</sup> Mummenschanz



Illustration: Brigitte Brault

## Happy Holidays

THE BIG APPLE CIRCUS • 35 WEST 35TH STREET, NY, NY 10001 • (212)268-2500

BIG APPLE CIRCUS IS A NOT-FOR-PROFIT PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATION.

On The Road With  
Barnes Comedy Co.

**R**oger Barnes was discharged from the army on January 18, 1919.

The show was closed and moved to storage in Charleston as C. J. had booked several theater dates in Florida and would work back to Charleston to continue the summer under canvas.

Roger's ticket was purchased so he wasted no time boarding a train to reach Key West in time for the opening date, January 21-February 2, 1919, and to see Ella Beers, for whose hand he asked George Beers, and for blessings he asked Clinton James and Alice Blanche Barnes.

After a two week booking in Key West, the company moved to Miami on Flagler's oversea trestle, later destroyed by the 1926 hurricane.

The Miami booking was for two weeks, February 3-16 and then to Ft. Lauderdale. Roger A. Barnes and Ella Elizabeth Beers were married there by Dr. Faris, a Presbyterian minister, on February 15, 1919.

Although Eddie Mixon was not related, he, being a young man the first time traveling away from home for the first time, was under the same protective, watchful eye of C. J. and Alice Blanche, as were their two sons, Clint and Roger. His marriage to Tillie Beers, however, did nothing to help glue the bondage of Beers and Barnes.

But Roger, being the younger son and an integral part of the Barnes hierarchy, did firmly secure that knot when he married Ella Beers; the knot which, indeed, formed the bond between the two families.

The Ft. Lauderdale date was February 17-22 which was the beginning of basically the same route taken a few years earlier with the E. K. Sibley carnival though now indoor instead of outdoor. Their last Florida date was Lake City, April 28-May 3, when they moved into Georgia, working Quitman, May 5-10.

They worked their way toward Charleston, South Carolina where the canvas and trucks were stored, after the long run during World War I. The tent was set and the show worked a two-week engagement under their own canvas while adding new equipment.

A stage truck was built to replace the platform which saved time setting and striking. The stage truck was backed into the tent from the end, the sides lowered onto jacks, with additional sections of staging added to make the full 32 foot stage.

A dressing room truck for the ladies

History of the  
**BEERS-BARNES CIRCUS**  
"The Barnum of the Sticks"  
By Harold Barnes  
**PART TWO**

was also backed in adjacent to and buttin' up against stage with the sides lowered to increase dressing space. A curtain was hung around the three open sides for privacy. The ladies' feet never touched the ground, and there was enough room behind the back drop so that one could walk from stage left to stage right.

The men were not catered to and dressed behind a partition off stage right, with stairs leading from the ground to stage level.

The reserved seat truck was backed in at a right angle at stage left and after the seats were unloaded, the side toward the audience was lowered to form a platform for a nine piece orchestra plus a piano, which never left the truck. Chrome stanchions about two feet high were inserted into the truck around the edge of the truck bed with small decorative lights circumventing the platform and a bally curtain closing off the wheels. The cab of the truck was outside the sidewalls.

The reserved seats and blues were also carried in the three trucks which brought them inside the tent for easier handling.

At this point the city electricians would install a switch box at the marquee from

The Comedy Company band around 1919. Left to right Tillie (Beers) Mixon, Eddie Mixon, Ella (Beers) Barnes, Clinton Barnes, C. J. Barnes, Irene Barnes, Anna Beers, George Beers, Charles Beers and Roger Barnes. Author's collection.



which Clint would string both the house lights and stage lights with controls and switches contained in a box in the wings, stage right.

The stage had a row of foot lights and three borders overhead. Carbon arc spot lights were too sophisticated. For a number that required a "pin spot" on a lady's face while singing, it was easier to crawl beneath the stage to the front bally curtain, stick a flash light out and turn it on. Crude but effective and a lot

less expensive. Slim Biggerstaff, the contortionist, usually got the job of wiggling beneath the stage. (He wasn't forced to join a union, either.)

There were both a roll up curtain and a draw curtain at the footlights and a second draw curtain about eight to ten feet upstage from the footlights for the acts working in "one."

There were three sets of scenery. One, indoor, parlor. Two, severe, devoid of decoration to be used as doctor's or other type office. Three, wooded scene. Three folding wings (flats) on either side of stage.

The seating was similar to Jethro Almond's with reserved seats down the center, starting about eight to ten feet from the stage to allow room for aerial acts to be hung. General admission blues were on either of the reserved seats, and afforded good vision. Below the Mason-Dixon line, one side was for black; the other, white. Above this imaginary line it was open seating.

The tents were always khaki: this one, 60 feet wide with a round end in front and a square, dramatic end in the rear to accommodate the stages. A small 20' x 20' marquee formed the entrance way with a ticket box in the center, always manned by C. J. Barnes.

All the trucks were Ford Model T, and as the old song said, they could be "patched up with a piece of string, Spearmint gum, or any old thing."

The show remained in South Carolina and Georgia the remainder of the 1919 season. It closed in Monticello, Georgia on November 1. The outfit was moved to Atlanta where it was stored on Edgewood Avenue.

In Atlanta, C. J. purchased an Aperson Jack Rabbit, a well known automobile of the day. It was his pride and joy, a Reo Speed Wagon in which he transported the Barnes family to Miami, Fla., for the winter. They were accompanied by the Beers family and Al and Ola Kadel who had purchased small Model T "Flivers" and proceeded to push their ways through the deep ruts of the soft sand strips of Florida, laughingly called "roads." It required one week to make the jump from Jacksonville to Miami.

Throughout the winter C. J. had the show band booked for band concerts in Bayfront Park to advertise sales, and grand openings which were occurring every day. The Reo Speed Wagon was converted into a band wagon and decked with painted banners hung on the sides which on lookers could read while listening to the music.

The band wagon was also a parade wagon, the band playing while being transported through town and environs to promote the sales of various land developers, a motley mixture of both legitimate and shyster.

Since the "land boom" of South Florida was in full swing, the families, as all tourists, were interested in purchasing property—not so much for investment, but for a winter home. C. J. warned everyone about "being taken." He elected himself a committee of one to select good and safe properties.

He apparently wasn't too good at evaluating property for when he returned home after being present at the ground breaking of Coral Gables, he said, "You couldn't give me anything in that rock pile." (Of course, everyone now knows that Coral Gables is now one of the most exclusive sections in the Miami area.)

They signed a contract with a man

named E. J. Willingham who had developed a delightful property in the North West area of Miami called Forest Park. The band would both bally at the site and drive around the area, playing and advertising.

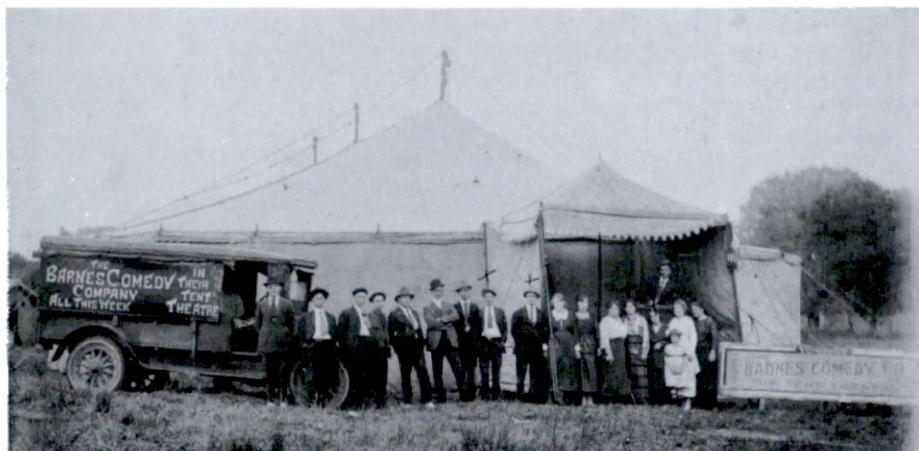
C. J. and Alice Blanche, Clinton and Irene, and Roger and Ella all purchased properties. All with small cottages. And the Beers family, an empty lot within the "conclave," on which to park their house cars. Also a large, adjoining property on which they permitted other shows, including circuses, to winter, complete with their animals including elephants. The Barnes family controlled the entire block, and mail had even been delivered with the address being only "Circus Alley," Miami, Florida.

In May they again fought the roads back to Atlanta and a special notation in Roger's route book specifically mentions the terrible roads between Jacksonville, Florida and Waycross, Georgia.

The 1920 season began in Newman, Georgia, May 10-15 with the Beers Family; Snyder & Vaughn; Eddie Mixon, Ernest Biggerstaff and the Barnes family which made a show of 14 people, a 9 piece band and a 7 piece orchestra. Al and Viola Kadel, I believe, went with Charles Sparks that year.

The next spot was Hogansville, Georgia, where on Saturday, May 22, 1920, Roger and Ella's first child, Doris Ruth, was born. She weighed 7 pounds and was the first of three daughters. Ella had a very difficult time with the birth, the carelessness of the country doctor coupled with complications, necessitated a second

Personnel of the Barnes Comedy Company in 1920. Left to right Charles Beers, three unknown, George Beers, Al Kadel, Slim Biggerstaff, Clint Barnes, Roger Barnes, Ella (Beers) Barnes, Tillie (Beers) Mixon, Viola Kadel, Alice Blanche Barnes, Irene Barnes, Clara Kritchfield, Anna Beers, C. J. Barnes on ticket box. Author's collection.



operation a month later with problems lasting the remainder of the season.

Exactly one month to the day after the birth of Doris, on June 22, 1920, in Talladega, Alabama, Irene, not to be outdone, gave birth to Clinton's only son, Harold Gordon, weighing in at eight pounds, three ounces.

The show band was playing the downtown concert in the court house square Tuesday, the second day in town. Directly above the band in a small hotel owned by a family named DeMotzis, and while the band was playing a popular tune called That's it Rag, I was being born.

Anna Beers was mid-wife and when the event was over she waved a diaper out the window and yelled to the band "It's a boy!" C. J. then stopped the band and gave Harold Barnes his first announcement.

Three weeks later in a playlet called Too Many Babies, they had me on the stage replacing a dummy that was previously used for this one act comedy, my father's conviction being that I was just as good as the dummy. (It was never revealed to me who DID play the part better; the dummy or me.)

Our pit dog, Dynamite, was on the show when I was first brought to the lot, and after "sizing" up the situation, he elected himself to be my personal body guard, a story which was published in Don Marck's *Circus Report*.

The Barnes family had always been very close to Charles Sparks and his wife "Miz" Addie. Shortly after Doris and I were born, we were visiting the Sparks Circus when "Miz" Addie came into the grandstand to hold the new babies. Now— from what they told me—while she was holding me in her lap, I thoroughly "christened" her much to my mother's embarrassment.

If this story is true, and I have no reason to doubt it, I feel that I can safely say that I am the only performer who has ever "soaked" Mrs. Charles Sparks in that manner. A very small claim to fame.

The show remained in Alabama and during the week of August 30-September 4, 1920. In Opp, they suffered their second blow-down. High winds completely destroyed the tent, but they were able to sew back together the dramatic end to install over the back stage area. The marquee wasn't damaged as it went down without resistance. The remainder of the area comprised of seats was "side-walled" and the show was advertised as the Big Airdome.

A new, identical tent was quickly ordered from M. D. Smith Tent and Awning Co., Atlanta, Georgia, and the show remained close to the area, using the open air format, until it arrived.

Clint, Roger, and Slim were wasting no



time waiting. Every day they were wearing out sail maker palms, canvas needles and thread, piecing together the damaged tent to be used as an emergency back-up during their winter trek through Florida. It was to be entirely under canvas with the exception of Miami, where the show was booked into the Strand Theatre the week of March 27, 1921.

The show continued without let-up or lay off through the entire year, 1921. The babies, Doris and Harold were christened in the Trinity Episcopal Church, Union Springs, Alabama on November 7. The show had 21 days in Montgomery: fourteen days at the West end lot and seven on the Capital building grounds.

The season ended the following week in Prattville, Alabama, December 9, 1921. The outfit was stored in a tobacco barn. Again they made the long trek to Miami, Florida.

The band continued to work Miami during the winters of 1921 and 1922. Clinton signed a three year contract for the band at the O. P. Smith Dog Track (which was later torn down to make room for the new horse track, Hialeah, to be built on the site).

Clinton also signed the orchestra to play nightly in the Jungle Inn night club. Although prohibition was in force, all night clubs sold liquor and had a back room for gambling.

The shows were usually the "exotic" type with partial nudity thought risqué at that time, but were tame compared to normal TV programs of today. Music was always in demand, and Ella and Tillie even joined an established girls' orchestra for the winters.

The troupe remained in Miami until May and then returned to "winter quarters" in Prattville where they painted and repaired the equipment; engaged in minor, walk-through rehearsals, and opened May 9 through 13.

Since there were no animals except the dogs, there was no point bringing the show equipment to Miami each fall only to haul it back north again in the spring. A portion of huge tobacco barns was usually rented and the trucks and equipment secured and parked for the winter, the

The Barnes Comedy Company with a truck and the big top in 1921. Author's collection.

family returning to Miami in their automobiles and house cars.

In the spring the show usually left Miami one month before opening to refurbish the equipment and to rehearse. Often-times the family would work its way north with Clint leaving several hours ahead of the caravan to book each night at some theater or hall on the route. Occasionally the turnout was good and the show remained a second day. Other times, a complete bust.

In booking these theaters, halls and auditoriums while traveling north to winter quarters, Clint would park his car in the street while making arrangements. The fleet would never pass his automobile.

Being very versatile people, and as a family, they could hire additional acts or do the show alone. They could work long seasons or extremely short. For example the 1920 and 1921 seasons were combined and the show worked 81 consecutive weeks without a planned lay-off. The 1922 season was but 30 weeks, which usually was the norm.

Al and Ola Kadel, Roger and Ella Barnes and the Beers family built house cars in which they lived on the lot and drove to and from Miami. C. J. and Alice Blanche and Clinton and Irene had living units on the lot, they preferred to live in hotels and rooming houses, and never took the units to Miami.

Slim Biggerstaff lived in a tent on the lot as did great grandfather Beers (George Beers' father) but Beers soon changed to rooming houses after Doris and I cut the tent down on him one day while playing.

I don't know why he started to do this because two very young children eating ice cream unattended can become quite a harrowing experience, but C. J. started to take Doris and I to the ice cream parlors each Monday after the show was set, even though we had just started walking—an event that continued until his death. It was a shrewd move and enabled him to have a social contact with the local town people who at that time, in very small vil-

lages, were quite suspicious of strangers.

On February 28, 1923, before the season opened, Clinton James (C. J.) Barnes, 62, suffered a severe heart attack and died.

The year before he was hospitalized with his first heart attack but survived. His doctor then advised that if he stopped eating steaks and heavy food, drinking coffee, and smoking, he probably would live about five years. My grandfather Barnes, C. J., asked the doctor how long he would live if he didn't stop this indulgence, and the doctor said about one year.

He thought for a moment or two. From his upbringing in a socially correct family who had everything; a man who rode on fox hunts with Edward VII, King of England; a man who always had the very best; and wanted the very best: if Lea and Perrins steak sauce wasn't available in a restaurant where he was eating a Porterhouse steak, he would give the waiter money with instructions to go out and purchase a bottle.

Even though he now owned and managed a little rag bag, traveling, vaudeville show, instead of the string of thoroughbred jumping horses which he sold of his own, free will just to be with his family, he still must conduct himself with the dignity of a gentleman.

He replied that he would rather have one good year than five without the joys of life.

He refrained from nothing, and lived exactly one year. I don't know whether I respect him for making such a decision or detest him for making it. It was selfishness on his part for doing only what he wanted with his life and to hell with anybody else's feelings, YES! But then, perhaps, it is I who am selfish for wanting him to stay with us longer, and to hell with whatever he wanted. I don't know. He gave me but a few years, but in those years he made a lasting impression on me as well as everyone else he touched.

I only wish he had lived long enough to have seen me performing in some of the great, major theaters of the world I have worked. Theaters that he dearly loved and where he first met Alice Blanche.

#### Conquest Of The South

Alice Blanche was now half owner of Barnes Comedy Co. With his mother's consent, Clinton offered to split the show three ways, making Roger one-third partner, but he still chose to work for a salary.

The show continued that year without difficulty. Clint did the advance booking of the towns—always on Tuesday, the day after opening—and he and Roger did the bill posting, on Wednesday, with less than one week advance notice. Promotions or advance sale of tickets were never necessary as lots usually were in

town and the band concerts either in center town or at the marquee let the towns people know they were there.

Roger, Slim Biggerstaff and Eddie Mixon learned horizontal bars. In clown make-up Roger and I did a stage acrobatic and risley act which we continued to do until I was six. I also did a song, dance and recitation that year.

This act, I know, had a great deal to do with the death of vaudeville. And though I was only four, I knew I didn't want to continue in that direction even though Alice Blanche had designs on my being both a concert pianist and a legitimate stage actor.

Dynamite, the pit bull dog and my protector, was added to the after piece, a playlet called College Days. It became one of the hits of the show, even having special paper.

In 1925, aware of the demand to see the motion picture photo plays used for the concert, the show's format was changed to a traveling motion picture theater. It played the very small towns that did not have a "movie house." Melodramas with a villain and "poor Nell" were used along with Harold Lloyd and Fatty Arbuckle short subject comedies. Cowboy movies, usually with Bob Steele, Tom Mix, or William S. Hart, were always shown on Saturday nights.

While changing the reels of film (they were not automatic in those days), vaudeville acts were presented on the stage, (the screen rolled up) with circus and novelty acts in front of the stage on the ground.

Concerts, one act after pieces, featuring "Snowball" with his dog, Dynamite, were heavily advertised and promoted and became as two distinct shows with the two admissions.

Roger had the 100% prize candy privilege with the stage flashed up with gifts to be won by purchasers lucky enough to find a coupon inside the box. The prizes shown were actually given away and were not just "flash." I had the 100% peanut privilege. The show starting me out with 100 pounds of raw peanuts which I roasted, bagged and sold. From then on I was on my own.

In 1925 Doris was doing a dance number on her toes. I did single trapeze, closing with a swinging one hock catch, free, a'la Albert Powell. Uncle Slim Biggerstaff set up my first wire and started my practicing.

George Beers, noting the success and simplicity of this format, left Barnes Comedy Co., taking Eddie Mixon with him, who was married to Matilda (Tillie). He formed a similar operation with motion pictures and vaudeville. George Beers formed a partnership with his son Charles, and they called the show Beers



The Barnes Comedy Company on a lot in the early 1920s. Author's collection.

Vaudeville Players. They remained in the mountain towns of West Virginia and Kentucky, while the Barnes Comedy Co. remained on the east coast.

Roger Barnes' wife, Ella (Beers) wanted them to go with her family but at Roger's insistence, they stayed with Barnes Comedy Co.

The Beers Players copied the format of the Barnes Comedy Co., putting Eddie Mixon in blackface and called him "Egg Shell." They did the Barnes show after pieces which they had written down during their many years together. Beers even copied the original monologues and comedy of "Snowball," and had Eddie use the songs Clint had personally written. Eddie wrote to Clint, to apologize and to explain the situation he was in.

During the winter of 1925, Clint received an offer to manage the U. S. Rubber Company's main outlet in Miami and to service the smaller branches up the state. He accepted the opportunity and gave Roger the "rolling store," and supplied the truck to deliver up state. It was a winter only operation, as Florida at that time was completely dead in the summer.

When I reached school age it was agreed that Clint would remain in Miami to manage the United States Tire Co., and Roger would leave the rolling store to manage the Barnes Comedy Co. and receive one third of the gross without investment, plus salaries for his and Ella's work in the show.

In the spring of 1926 Irene, being an important part of the show, left with Alice Blanche, taking me along with her.

Hollis Cone, from Soperton, Georgia, who operated the motion picture projector and worked in the after pieces knew the routines of "Snowball" and was tutored to replace him. "Sabbo" Cone opened with the show to work the doubles with Roger and Hollis remained with the show for many years after Clint returned. He was worked into all of the skits, after pieces and plays.

I practiced all summer on the road and was ready for my first wire act when the

show returned to Miami that fall. Late in August I performed for the "William Jennings Bryan Bible Class" at the band shell in Bayfront Park, Miami, accentuating his lecture on "Walking the Straight and Narrow Path." I was six.

One month later, in September, Miami was all but leveled by a hurricane, now known only as the '26 storm. Roger's wife, Ella, went into labor at the beginning of the hurricane with their second child, Lois, (now Mrs. Dave Hoover on the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus). She delivered in the height of all its fury with the assistance of mid-wife Alice Blanche.

Their home was being torn apart but she couldn't be moved to safety until the baby was born. When she delivered, Roger carried his wife through the howling tempest to the next door neighbor, with Alice Blanche carrying the baby. She was written up in the Miami *Herald* as the "Storm Baby."

Clinton's warehouse and apartment was completely leveled. Only the iron bedsteads saved us when the roof crashed down. After crawling out from under the debris, Clint, Irene, the dog, Dynamite, and I spent the night in our 1926 Dodge, which luckily had an all steel body. It was battered and bruised and even in gear. With the brakes applied it was pushed around that two-acre lot as if it were a toy.

Clint rebuilt a concrete block warehouse and remained with the tire company throughout 1927 with Roger. Alice Blanche, Irene, and Ella again went out with the show.

Two years off the road was all Clint could tolerate and he decided to return the following 1928 season.

During the winter between 1926 and 1927, William Ketrow, of Kay Bros. Circus, gave me a Welch pony named Cuban. Roger brought him to Miami in the rolling store and from which I proceeded to fall, suffering a dislocated, compound fracture of my right arm, both bones penetrating the skin. Eddie Mixon first saw the accident. Before I stopped rolling, he was whisking me off to a hospital, giving me the ride of my life. I didn't go on the road in 1927, but remained in Miami with

Clint to recuperate and to build the wire act back up.

A young girl named Lucinda Hamilton, whose back bending was so close she could sit on her head, replaced me in the punk department. She was such a hit with the audiences, she remained two years, the second year sharing billing with both Doris and me.

The motion picture business, though lucrative at first, was rapidly waning since every cross road now had its own movie house. The novelty was temporarily wearing off.

Alice Blanche, who had spent her youth on the legitimate stage, suggested a repertoire show with three act plays. Vaudeville and circus numbers could be presented between the acts and after piece concerts could be given, again playing up "Snowball."

The Beers family and Barnes family, though not associated in business as yet, did share ideas in the winter season. They discussed the "rep" show format in depth, both families deciding that her idea would be a welcome change and would stimulate business as their individual routes were always repeated.

The Barnes family changed the name to Barnes Players and, likewise, the Beers family changed theirs to Beers Players. The pictorial heralds of the Barnes Players would feature "The latest dramas and comedy plays direct from New York; "Snowball," the South's favorite comedian; Ella, the girl who makes the banjo talk; Irene, the little girl with the dancing feet; Dainty Doris on her toes; Lucinda, the girl who sits on her head; and young Harold on the tight wire." (It sounds like a side show bally, doesn't it?)

There were song and dance numbers between every act and "Snowball" was in and out throughout the show. He was so well known at that time that immediately before his single he would stick his head out between the curtain and say, "Don't nobody go! I'm next." And for no reason at all the crowd would scream.

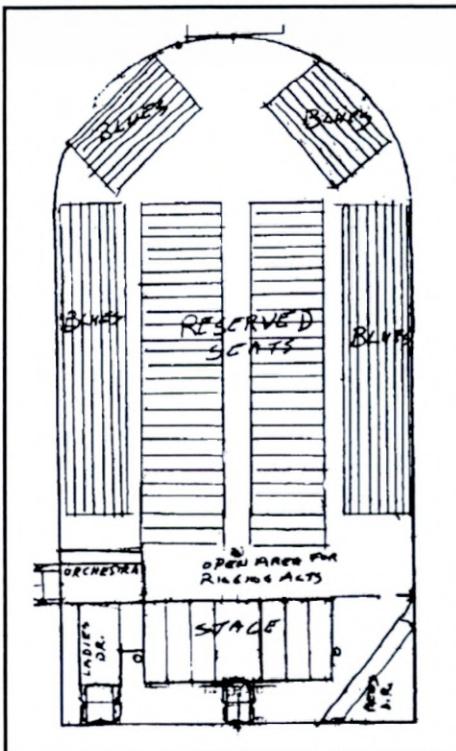
An older, legitimate stage director named William Triplett with his wife, Maude, a fine actress, answered an ad in the *Billboard* and joined with a briefcase filled with scripts of established Broadway plays. One of them was *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*.

During rehearsals on Barnes Players, director Triplett suggested that Irene should do the young girl's part, Mary Morgan since she broke into legitimate show business doing that roll when she was five or six. She was then twenty-nine and quite skeptical about doing the part. But the director, who was the "Ye Gods!" type of actor and used a full beard for the part of Joe Morgan, and she being petite

and with a simple, cotton dress. It worked.

However, the next year, Doris, Roger's oldest daughter, then eight years of age, had the part. She and I would fight all day on the lot, trying to kill each other, but during the death scene I would sit in the front row of the reserved seats, peanut basket in my arms, and cry.

The opening for the Beers Players was similar. Another older director named



Inside layout of the Barnes Players before converting to the Beers-Barnes Circus. Author's drawing.

"Mac" joined with scripts like *Way Down East*, another old tear-jerker which during a revival back in 1898 still managed to have a run of over 375 performances.

In 1927, in Hillsboro, Virginia, a young girl of thirteen named Sadie Baker, watching the plays became star struck and came to the lot one day to apply for a position, saying she was sixteen. She talked with Anna (Grandma) Beers and said she would bring a letter of permission from her mother. She stayed with Grandma Beers and her first jobs were washing dishes and working in the cook house for \$7.00 per week (which she said she never received).

She was a beautiful girl and soon Mac worked her into a couple of plays including the part of Kate Brewster in *Way Down East*.

That winter, Paramount pictures contacted Clint to do a one reel short on Har-

old Barnes. It was followed by the newsreel companies of Pathé News, Paramount News, Fox Movietone News and Metronome News.

The following winter Grantland Rice Sportlight made a short of me and my father, describing the training and practice necessary to create a finished tight wire performer.

At the beginning of the 1930 season Roger gave Clint the ultimatum. Either Clint would turn the show over to him or he would leave and move to the Beers Players.

The ailment Alice Blanche had been bothered with was diagnosed as cancer. Clint, not wanting to break up the family at a time like this agreed. Ownership was transferred to Roger, but the format and operation remained the same.

The changeover, however, contributed to one disturbing problem. Slim Biggerstaff was from Anderson, South Carolina, where his family owned and operated a moonshine still during this prohibition period, and was a perpetual drinker.

He and Clint were always friends, and knowing the procedures for finding illegal stills, he would bring bottles of moonshine to the lot where he and Clint would drink, sometimes excessively, since Clint was now not involved in the operation of the show.

This caused much concern to his mother and especially his wife as his drinking became heavier. Occasionally, when he had been drinking she would not permit him to enter the house car. On these occasions he would sleep on sidewalls beneath the stage, under the tent.

As a child growing up this also disturbed me greatly. And whenever I would see drinking men around the lot, I knew an illegal moonshine still was nearby and my father would end up drinking with Slim. (Roger never drank nor smoked.)

One Monday when I was eight or nine, this situation arose, and come opening night, Clint was not to be found. The show was hurriedly altered to offset this loss of a feature, and, as the saying goes, "the show went on."

Tuesday morning I searched the lot, finally locating him asleep beneath the orchestra truck. I crawled under and awakened him, advising that it was Tuesday morning and that he missed the opening night. I then turned away and wouldn't associate with him for several days.

He gathered together his mother, wife, brother and me and said, "When a man allows drinking to become a wedge between him, his family, the show, and his son, then it is time to quit." And I am proud to say, that was my father's last drink.

Nineteen hundred thirty-one. The depression, dragging on since 1929, was devastating to businesses, virtually wiping out every show on the road. (During the early 1930's there were fewer than 23 road companies and they were folding every day.)

A well known song from the Ziegfeld Follies at that time was *Brother Can you Spare a Dime*, and Clint suggested that everybody had a dime to spare, and everyone needed some sort of entertainment. Therefore, reduce the show to family only and run ten cents. "Jethro Almond did it."

Paper was printed with "10 CENTS" larger than the name of the show. Everybody, children and adults alike, would pay 10 cents to enter the tent. Reserved seats were 10 cents, prize candy was 10 cents, and the concert, 10 cents. Peanuts remained 5 cents.

It worked well and since the cost of living was very low, the show survived and made money. Everybody doubled, Clint even doing the heavy character, Joe Morgan (without the full beard) in *Ten Nights*, working with niece, Doris as Mary Morgan. Occasionally on opening day, Monday, if the lot was close enough into town, I would do a foot slide in front of the marquee for a "free act."

Since the after show concerts were primarily "Snowball" oriented, Clint had the concert in lieu of salary, which made it easier on the office, but yet was a good salary for himself for he was the draw. I still had the peanut privilege.

The Beers Players also followed the 10 cent format which worked just as well in the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia as it did for the Barnes Players on the east coast. Sadie was sixteen and now playing leads in the different plays. Since Charley Beers and his first wife, Frankie, had separated about the same time Sadie joined, he found himself hanging around her quite a bit of the time and soon they were married. The marriage produced three children, George Willis, Jean Anna, and Dianne.

The love bug must have flown over to the Barnes Players as well, for in the fall of 1930 Alice Blanche and Ernest (Slim) Biggerstaff also were married much to the

dismay of the two boys, especially Clint, who associated Slim as a former drinking buddy. Neither he nor anyone else was good enough for Alice Blanche except C. J. Irene and Ella convinced the boys that she didn't have long to live and deserved all the happiness possible. Slim turned out to be a caring and loving husband.

Alice Blanche's cancer was kept under control until the winter of 1931 when it started to spread. Although she weakened rapidly, she wanted to go on the road but was bedridden almost all of 1932. The show closed early and went to Miami where she died and was laid to rest with C. J.

Due to the laws of matrimony, Slim Biggerstaff then became half owner of Barnes Players.

The year 1933 was going along very well, and the "Ten Cent" format was no longer necessary. I was improving rapidly with the wire act and received a lot of press.

Herald used by the Barnes Players in 1929. Author's collection.

All the novelty acts went over exceptionally well. A circus type act along with a vaudeville act was given between the acts every night. Monday, Slim's contortion trapeze, and clown acrobatic-risley with Roger and me on the stage. Tuesday, my wire act. Wednesday, horizontal bars. Thursday, double trapeze. Friday, a repeat of my wire act ("by popular demand" even though it was in the weekly schedule), and Slim's stage contortion number. Saturday, my single trapeze act.

It was no wonder the show made the move toward circuses.

Doris, during this period remained on the stage, cast as Mary Morgan in *Ten Nights* and doing a toe tap dance and a song and dance routine with me. She started to look old enough to work ingenue in the plays and was cast in *Call of the Wild* where she had to kiss one of the actors—something she hated.

In the middle of the season Roger "dropped the bomb." He approached his brother, Clint and advised him that he

was closing the Barnes Players the end of the week and was merging with the Beers show.

For many successive years George Beers had suggested a merger between the two shows, but Clint and Alice, remembering the continuing incidents of the concert sales and other "not so honest dealings" in the past, always declined.

Ella, Roger's wife, wanted to be with her family, which was understandable, so it was always assumed that since Roger was now in control, a merger one day was inevitable.

Nevertheless Clint was dumbfounded since he knew nothing of the plans until that moment and said, "Since Eddie Mixon is over there doing all my black face routines, I don't suppose you will be needing me."

"There never will be another 'Snowball,' Clint," replied Roger. "You know that. We've been together all of our lives, and I'd like for us to stay together."

"With just the 'Barnes Brothers,' I would go to the end of the earth," said Clint. "But you know how I feel about George Beers and there's no way I would work for him, or with him. Besides, one black face comedian is enough for any show."

Barely able to face one another, the two brothers turned and walked away.

This was the first disagreement Clinton and Roger ever had—and the last.

The week sadly ended and though I did my wire act Tuesdays and Fridays, the demand was so heavy that week, I was forced to work again Saturday night (the "popular demand" bit finally held water), which pleased me considerably but, I was quite sad for I felt that this was my last act with the family show.

Little did I know.

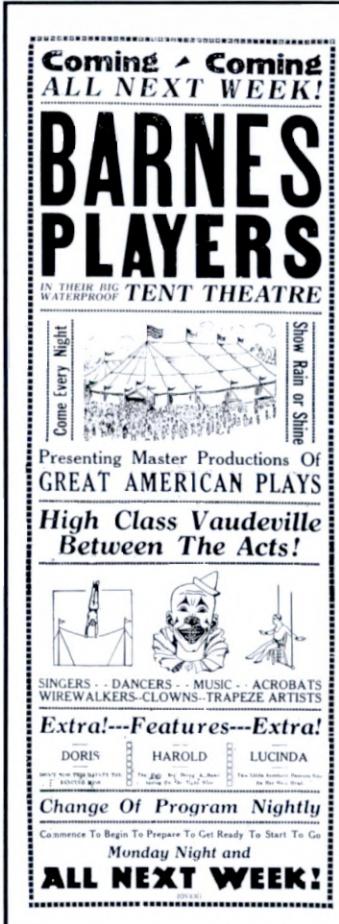
### The Barnes Players And The Beers Players

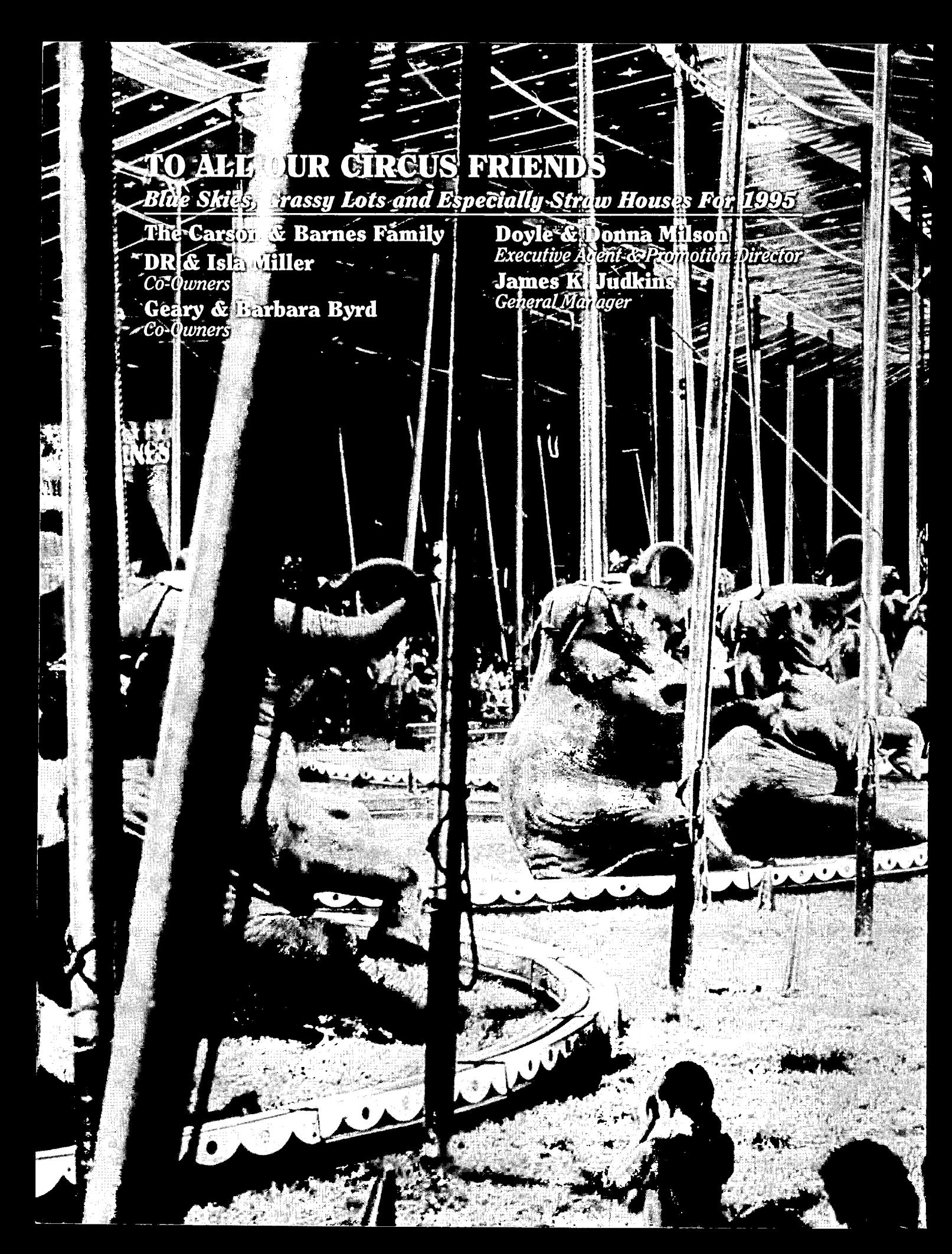
The Beers Players planned a week open, moved into the Barnes Players territory and waited for the Barnes' equipment to arrive in order to regroup the two shows into one.

They combined middle pieces from both tents to increase the size and laced in the best end sections, forming a tent 60 feet wide by 120 feet in length. For the remaining portion of 1933 they continued with the same interior design that both shows used with the dramatic shows with the same open area in front of the stage for the circus acts.

Seating was the same as was used with the dramatic shows except the numbers were increased. In essence, it was merely an expanded Beers Players or Barnes Players.

The name of the show was changed to Beers & Barnes Variety Show, and ran





# TO ALL OUR CIRCUS FRIENDS

*Blue Skies, Grassy Lots and Especially Straw Houses For 1995*

**The Carson & Barnes Family**

**DR & Isla Miller**

*Co-Owners*

**Geary & Barbara Byrd**

*Co-Owners*

**Doyle & Donna Milson**

*Executive Agent & Promotion Director*

**James K. Judkins**

*General Manager*



thusly the remainder of the 1933 season.

I honestly do not think that a circus was planned at this time--just the merger and finishing the season. My cousins, Doris Barnes Davis and Lois Barnes Hoover, likewise do not know for sure and I have found nothing in records to verify or repudiate this thought.

Arriving from Beers Players were the Beers family, Sadie, now Mrs. Charles Beers, Eddie Mixon, married to Matilda (Tillie) Beers, Paul and Ruth Belafonte, a single man named Denton, and "Sundown," Napoleon Thomas.

From Barnes Players, only the Roger Barnes family (his wife, Ella, being a Beers), Slim Biggerstaff who legally was half owner of Barnes Players, and a musician and banner man, named Norman Weitzel.

The stage presentations were basically the same as Barnes Comedy Co. during World War I.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bryan and Billie Woods, famed monkey circus people from the larger carnivals, and very good friends, had started a small, side-walled circus and were near by. Obert Miller with his animals were there as well as Billy and Jenny Lerch with their ground rings and juggling routines carried the show interspersed with Billy Woods' classic handling and talking to her simian co-workers.

They welcomed Clint, Irene and Harold, with open arms and we remained the remainder of the season, Clint exchanging his burnt cork and "Snowball" for zinc oxide and the talking clown. I contributed the wire act, a foot slide and single trapeze. I was twelve years old at the time. The show must have pleased for it wasn't run out of any town.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was cold that winter in Miami on Circus Alley, and I don't mean weather wise. Rogers house was directly across the street from Clint's. Slim Biggerstaff--though opposed to the move--lived in Alice Blanche's and his house car, which was parked behind C. J.'s house. About one hundred feet beyond was the Beers lot which C. J. had purchased for them.

Clint would not speak to Roger, and Roger avoided any eye contact with Clint. Slim, who had been a very good friend and "drinking buddy," in their wild youth from the very opening of the show, remained inside his house car as did the Beers family on their lot, and tried to avoid any contact.

It was that way the entire winter of 1933 and 1934 until Clint "broke the ice" the summer of 1934.



The author at age twelve with the Barnes Players in 1932. Pfening Archives.

I had received overtures before from the Ringling organization about my wire act and Clint contacted Pat Valdo for the 1934 season.

Pat Valdo answered that he had heard great things about the boy and Ringling wanted him but not that year. Con Colleano had already been booked for the season. Since he was a big feature, he was afraid Harold's act might be too strong to work against him, and to contact him the following year.

His reply continued to say that though a 12-year old somersaulting tight wire performer would be great for the show, he thought I might have been too young as they had been having a lot of trouble with the Child Labor laws, and he knew that someone on the show had been reporting the underage performers. But again, be sure to make contact next year.

Charley Allen, brother of Mert, of the Allen Bros. Wild West show, was opening a circus called Beverly Bros. He and his wife, Rose, who later married Buck Steele, made an offer and it was accepted.

We joined Beverly Bros. Circus, for the 1934 season. The roster included Charley and Rose Allen with son, Charles, Jr., Kirk Adams and his wife, Tillie (Rose's sister), Buck Steele's wild west, Fred Motts, Australian whips, and the elephant, Maxine, owned by W. C. Richards and handled by M. A. Miller.

I did wire, foot slide and single traps and my father, Clint, clowned the show with two other men he broke in. (Sort of a poor man's Clown College.)

In South Carolina, the state tax collector while talking with Charles Allen mentioned two partners who, he was positive, were getting a bad deal. One was a partner on the Barnett Show, and the other, young Roger Barnes on Beers-Barnes. He stated that he absolutely knew that three sets of books were being kept: One with the actual records, one to show the South Carolina tax collectors, and one to show Barnes. He stated that if Barnes weren't such a nice person, the state would attach

the show for withheld taxes.

Charley Allen asked, "If I bring someone else in here, will you repeat what you just said?" And he called Clint.

Clint then broke the ice with his brother, Roger. From past experiences, Clint wasn't too surprised but he dispatched a telegram to Roger, saying, "I hear from unquestioned sources that you are getting a bad deal. If you feel you are not receiving a fair shake, pull stakes and I'll go in with you with any type show you want. Clint."

The answer from Roger simply stated, "I know I'm getting a square deal. Thanks anyway, Rog."

Clint never brought it up again.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beers-Barnes eliminated the vaudeville and opened the 1934 season with pure circus but still used the 60' tent with two 30' middle pieces. A ring was under one middle and a portable stage under the other.

Doris Barnes and Sadie Beers practiced tight wire and swinging ladder the winter of 1933 and 1934 and Doris, learned single trapeze with chair balancing for closing. Eddie Mixon and Sadie Beers developed a very nice double trapeze act and Eddie, horizontal bars. Lois Barnes (Mrs. David Hoover) was practicing but as yet wasn't in the show. She was only seven.

Mervin Ray and family joined doing clowning, rings, swinging ladder and magic in the side show. They were good entertainers and remained for many years.

Obert Miller was there with his dogs and ponies and Ted LaVelda operated a side show.

Norman Weitzel, a pianist from the Barnes players remained and sold banners. "Sundown" rounded out the show.

The first few years Roger went ahead of the show to book and bill until he decided to return to the lot and hire an agent.

The show was split four ways: George and Charley Beers; and Roger and Slim. George Beers exerted pressure to squeeze Slim out so his one fourth interest was bought out by giving him the small, straight job truck he always drove.

The 1934 season played the same routes as the week-stand operations of the Barnes Players. The jumps were short.

Three elephants were leased, one "working" Roger over in the middle of the street during a promotion. He wasn't seriously injured but bruised up quite a bit. He worked himself out from underneath the bull, quieted them down and returned them to the lot.

\*\*\*\*\*

While Clint and family were with Beverly Bros., Joe Redding, a circus fan,

known by the massive size of his hands, visited Hagenback-Wallace Circus. He was aware that Jess Atkins, manager, was taking out an all new thirty car railroad show the following year, 1935, with partner, Zack Terrell. He brought Atkins over one matinee to see my performances, and was impressed enough to meet with my father in town after the show where they made a tentative deal which was finalized that winter.

The contract with Jess Atkins and the new Cole Bros. Circus was signed for me by Clint Barnes, my father, since I was a minor. Atkins wanted only the wire act. He was afraid I might be injured from either the trapeze or foot slide and since he would be featuring me with special paper, he was playing it safe.

Cole had an indoor date in Columbus, Ohio, for the Acacia Club, about a month before the opening. Atkins wanted me to try out in "big company" before the official opening. Clyde Beatty and the Crisitanis were featured, along with the Flying Thrillers, with Bert Doss and Mitzie Sleeter leaping and Red Sleeter catching, and also The Arthur Nelson Family.

In the wire display, Don Francisco had the center ring, Rosina Nelson of the Nelson family in one end, and I in the other. Apparently the audiences were straining their necks, looking down to the end ring. One of Atkins' advisers suggested they remove Don Francisco and Rosina Nelson and place me in the center ring alone to see if this "punk" could hold it down, which they did.

After the Columbus date we returned to winter quarters in Rochester, Indiana, where the wire rigging was set for practice in the elephant barn. The body heat from the bulls warmed the building nicely.

One day a group of circus fans visited from Chicago to size up this new show. They were taken to the bull barn and introduced to my father and me. One fan introduced himself as Cancie. My father remarked that he once worked with a man named Cancie. Cancie replied that he had been involved with a vaudeville show years before but he was certain that it was long before his time.

My dad replied that the man's name was N. Harry Cancie and it was around 1908 or 1909. Cancie thought, solemnly for a few seconds, repeating the name, Clint Barnes, trying to set the name clearly in his mind, and finally said, "My God! don't tell me that you're C. J. Barnes' son, 'Snowball!'"

Following a severe fall in Fall River, Massachusetts in 1937, I was sent to the St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago for repairs and Harry Cancie kept me at his house during the recuperation period before returning me to the show.



Harold Barnes on Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus in 1936. The show used a lithograph similar to the photo featuring Barnes. Pfening Archives.

Cole Bros. opened March 17, 1935, at the Coliseum, Chicago. In the wire display I was center ring, Rosina Nelson in one end, and a Spanish act in the other. After the second day the two end ring acts were removed. This left Clyde Beatty, Alan King, with another wild animal act, and I as the only acts to work alone.

The second or third day after opening, a telegram was received from Pat Valdo of the Ringling show which stated in part: "Break your contract anyway that you can. Keep the boy out of the major cities this season. I will send a contract immediately, tripling whatever salary you're receiving on the Cole show and will give Harold center ring and all the press and build-up that you know the Ringling organization is capable of giving."

I was thrilled and excited over this possibility but my father being a honorable man answered in part: "Thank you for your very generous offer. Jess Atkins took a gamble on the ability and strength of Harold, and accepted the possibility of problems due to his age. Therefore, there's no way I would even consider breaking my contract with them."

The Cole show and their legal adjuster, "Doc" Partello, did encounter the child labor enforcement groups on many occasions, but a fixer is supposed to "fix," and that is what Partello did. On one such encounter they asked him to take their group to see "that little boy."

"What little boy?" Partello inquired, looking dumbfounded.

"You know, that little boy who walks the tight rope."

With that Partello let out with a guffaw, and laughing, he told the group that he wasn't a "little boy" but a midget. He has

a wife and family. You should know a kid couldn't do what he does.

They partially believed him but still wanted to see me to verify his story, but Partello answered that he saw "him" just a short while ago going down to the pool hall with some friends for a game or two of pool, and some drinks, and if they went down there, they could talk with him now. He got away with it.

In 1936 the Cole show opened in the Stadium, Chicago, and made the west coast run following the Al G. Barnes route. In 1937 we opened in the Hippodrome, New York, for a month, then back to Chicago for the Stadium run before going under canvas, opening in Rochester, Indiana.

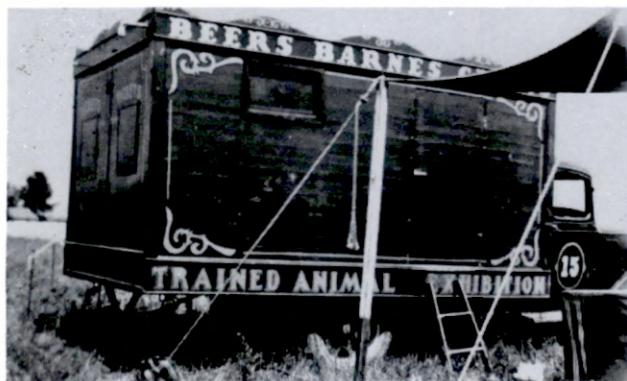
\*\*\*\*\*

On September 25, 1936, (Alice Blanche's birthday), in Charleston, South Carolina, Roger and Ella's third daughter was born. She was named Barbara Ann.

In 1938 Beers-Barnes big top was enlarged to an 80 with three 30's. Lee Daniels and his wife, Lila took over the side show and supplied a nice banner line. Inside he had three or four platforms. The show furnished the bally platform.

It was a combination menagerie with Alice the elephant, leased from Ray Rogers of the Barnett and Wallace Shows, ponies, horses and the cage wagon (a truck with several individual cages inside for monkeys, and other small animals). Lee Daniels and Lila had a snake which was taken out on the bally platform. Inside he did magic and had a sword box with his wife.

He wanted a "half and half" for the blow-off but Roger, being a "Sunday School" showman argued against it. Under pressure from the family, and Lee, he agreed and Jackie Francis came over. Francis was an asset to the show, not only in extra revenue from the blow-off, but a person who would do anything asked of him.



The Beers-Barnes Circus ticket wagon in 1937. Pfening Archives.

The 1938 season carried the strongest show yet. Buck and Rose Steele joined from Tom Atkinson's Howe Bros. with his wild west concert, and equestrian work in the main show. They would bally the town in Kirk Adam's glass-decorated truck with seven musicians (four from the family), which was the last year a band was carried. Ella then began to play the show with her Hammond Organ continuing until the show's final closing.

One of Buck Steele's group was a man named Walter Davis. He was a man possessed with a wealth of knowledge of leather and canvas repair, along with skill in breaking horses. He and Doris took a liking to each other and soon they were married.

When Buck Steele's contract ended, Walt remained on the show and became the side show boss canvasman.

The following year, he was boss canvasman of the big top. He talked Roger and Charley into purchasing three horses to break into both a liberty act and menage. He and Doris also added a wild west concert, introducing something new with the three girls, Doris, Sadie, and now Lois adding western songs.

The show in the past had hired their pony and dog acts like Obert Miller and

A horse van on Beers-Barnes in 1937. Pfening Archives.



Kirk and Tillie Adams. Walter convinced Roger and Charley to purchase some dogs and ponies to break for an established act. He reminded them that the ponies could also be used for a pony ride for additional revenue.

When they got the dog and ponies Tillie (Beers) Mixon worked them under the name Madame Tillie. She also had concessions.

The zeal and determination of Roger Barnes and Walter Davis, manually putting it up, taking it down, moving it across country, working the show and squaring beefs without much help from Roger's partners, I feel, kept Beers-Barnes alive.

Although he had no say in the matter, Clint, Doris' uncle, was concerned and did not like the idea of her marrying a cowboy. His feelings were based on associations with certain cowboys in the past. He made a special trip to Beers-Barnes just to see and to evaluate this man. He found that Walt had a certain kind of gruffness; yet, a hidden tenderness. A certain stubbornness; yet, in secret a willingness to relent. A hardened, outward appearance because he was working and pushing men, but one who would love and care for his daughters throughout their lives.

A special kind of guy; and there was no hiding his love for Doris.

Years later when Walt died, Buck Steele wrote a very moving and sincere tribute to Walter Davis in *Circus Report*.

Clint took an immediate liking to Walt and, I believe, Walt to him. This was solidified when Walt sent Dad a birthday card which read: "From one old Fart to Another."

\*\*\*\*\*

In the middle of the 1937 season, at sixteen, I was quarantined in a hospital in Ohio for one week with the measles. When I returned to the show I was very weak but went back into the performance immediately, but eliminated some of my more difficult somersaults as I was still very weak.

During that first week back, in Fall River, Massachusetts, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sparks visited the show and wanted to see the act of the young boy who once "wet" on her.

My father warned me not to "show off" and do anything fancy as I was

not yet ready for a full act. I didn't heed his advice and DID want to "show off" for "Miz" Addie and Mr. Sparks and wanted, at least, to do a standing feet-to-feet somersault for them. Every time I came to the pedestal I would tell my father that I felt great, and wanted to do a "standing back." Finally he relented but advised me to "play it safe."

I had worked hard during the act and was quite exhausted when I went to the middle of the wire in preparation for the somersault. My father positioned himself beneath me for safety. I probably completed the most perfect somersault I had ever done, without hardly moving a muscle, and Clint, seeing that I was safe, turned and ran back to the pedestal.

Light headiness began to set in and suddenly I blacked out. When I came to, I was lying on the ground with Dad and property men around me. They carefully carried me out to the back door where luckily that day an ambulance was standing by.

I'll always remember Gus Bell, who was doing teeter-board on the show that year along with his wife Betty, brother, Howard and his wife, Wanda. Gus was looking on so helpless, wanting to do something for me but couldn't. And when they loaded me into the ambulance Gus slowly picked up my slop shoes and carried them back to my trunk.

Hospitals in Fall River were not equipped to do anything for the type of fractures I suffered so they shipped me to Boston. Doctors in Boston said they could repair my arm and shoulder but I would never have use of them again.

Finally an orthopedic man recalled a doctor in Chicago who worked on athletes. His joy was to take a broken-up athlete and put him back in the field. His name was Harry Mock and he agreed to do what he could.

I was shipped to Chicago with my mother and placed in St. Luke's Hospital for the miracle Dr. Mock performed on me.

N. Harry Cancie (his first name was actually Napoleon) was then an executive with the Walter Johnson Candy Company. He visited me almost every day bringing boxes of candy which, he instructed, were not for me, but for the nurses so that they would give me more attention. When I was finally placed in a body cast, Cancie took me to his home to recuperate.

I returned to the show late in the fall and resumed practice but worked only with a much shortened act a few weeks toward the end of the season. Jess Atkins cornered my father saying he wanted to talk about 1938. My right arm still wasn't working too well from the "buster" so Dad turned down the offer for dates less



demanding—a good thing for the Cole show closed without notice the middle of 1938.

When the 1937 season ended, I worked two indoor circus dates for Harold Voise, which, I believe were his first, Mansfield, Ohio, and Waterloo, Iowa. I then went to Chicago for the Oriental Theatre, the Tower Theatre, Kansas City and back to Chicago for a week at the Rialto, a burlesque theater on State Street. Experiencing feelings of false pride, working a burlesque house, I changed my name to Sonny Gordon for the week.

The name change was foolish for the theater was a class house, having a chorus girl line of 16 and featuring Sally Rand. I shared a dressing room with Herb Shriner. My dad, from the old school, advised

A Beers-Barnes semi trailer c-1939. Author's collection.

that most of the major comics and many of our headline acts originated from burlesque. I never yielded to vanity again.

Dad's remark was proven to me for I signed with Lee Shubert in 1938 to work with two of the top burlesque comics, Ole Olson and Chick Johnson in their zany show, *Hellzapoppin*. I moved over to *Streets of Paris*, another Shubert show in 1939, which introduced Carmen Miranda to the American audiences for the first time. It also starred three other great burlesque comics, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello and a great favorite of the New York legitimate stage, Bobby Clark. It was Gower Champion's first show and he danced with his cousin, Jean, (Gower &

Jean) before marrying Marge after the war.

In 1939 the *Billboard* ran a year long performer's contest. People involved in show business filled in official printed ballots listing spaces for ten performers and their type act they thought were the best, (or their favorite). Their first choice being No. 1 and so on.

Now, being in legitimate theater, I felt slighted for I knew that circus people and circus fans, seeing circuses every day would soon forget my act, and I would have no chance in the contest. But when the finals were printed in the Christmas issue I was quite surprised to find I came in sixth place, overall categories, and voted first in the wire walking division (all branches) being 10,000 votes over my closest competitor.

The Broadway run of *Streets of Paris* ended the fall of 1939. A condensed, grind, version was planned for the 1940 New York World's Fair. I left, worked Loew's State Theater, and went on to Halifax, for the Nova Scotian Provincial Exhibition for George Hamid, late in August.

In the middle of the week the Wallendas and other German and Italian acts were ordered to strike their riggings and leave Canada immediately.

Two days later on September 1, 1939 Hitler's juggernaut rolled into Poland and World War II began.



SEASONS  
GREETINGS  
To all our old  
and new  
FRIENDS

# THE FINAL SIDESHOW



Ward Hall and C. M. Christ announce the closing of their sideshow at the end of the 1994 season, after 46 years.

Their show is the only remaining circus, fairgrounds sideshow in outdoor show business.

To commemorate the passing of this indigenous American art form they gathered for the final performance, sideshow performers who you will see perform and personal interview of each:

Ward Hall, C. M. Christ, owners/managers; Bobby Reynolds, (with Ruth Strong Reynolds), lecturer; Pete Terhurne, fire manipulation and snake handler; Lady Dane (Faul), sword swallower; John Meah (with Joan Meah, fire manipulator, block head, sword swallower; John and Alexandria Trower, knife throning, sword and neon swallowing and walking on hot coals; Dick Brisben, "The Penguin Man;" Lorrette Fulkerson, tattooed lady; Zenobia, bearded lady juggler; Harold Huge, 712 pound dancing fat man; and Jimmy Long, canvas boss.

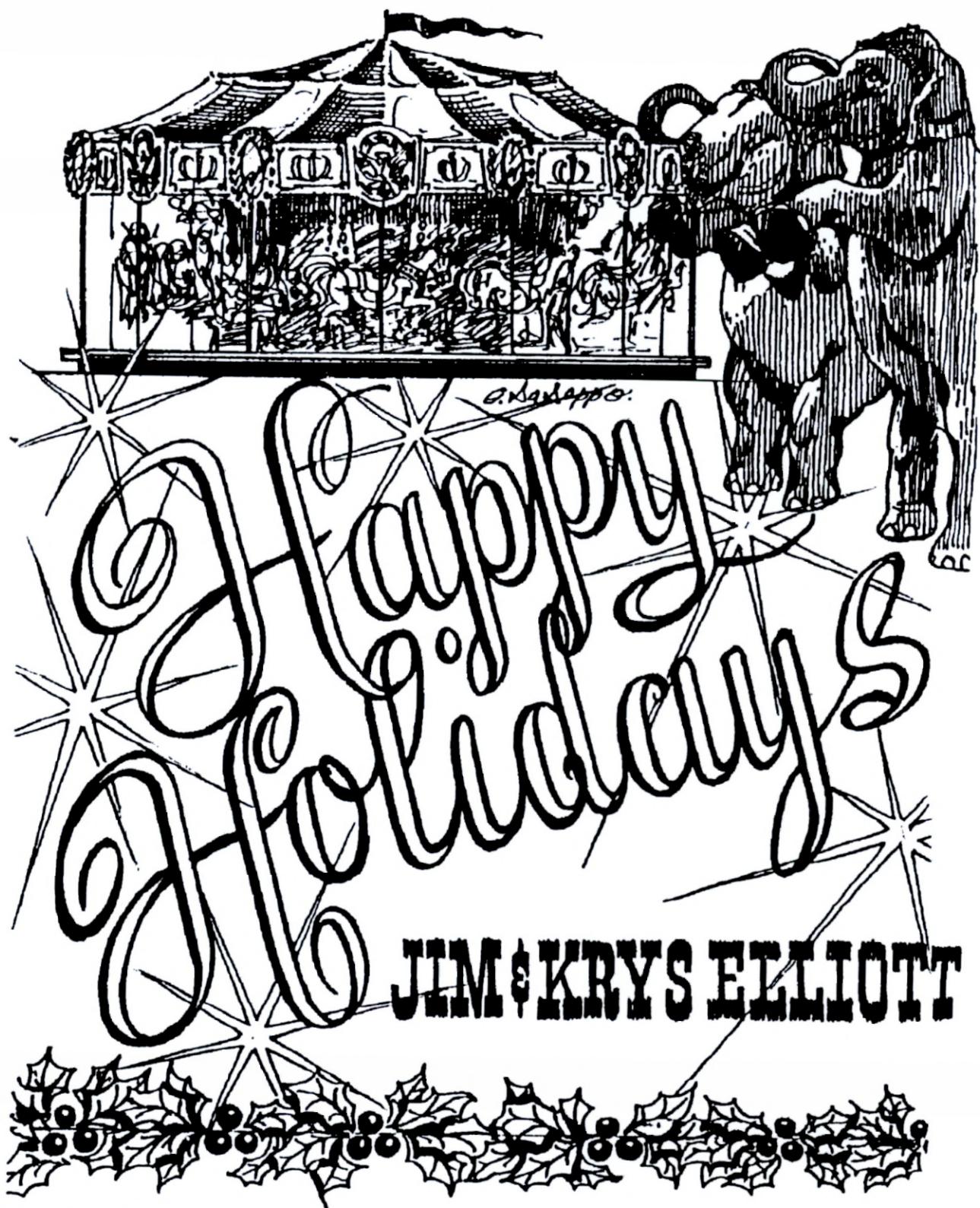
This one hour video tape is of new footage, never before seen. Only a limited number will be issued.

Send check or money order for \$29.50 each, including postage to:

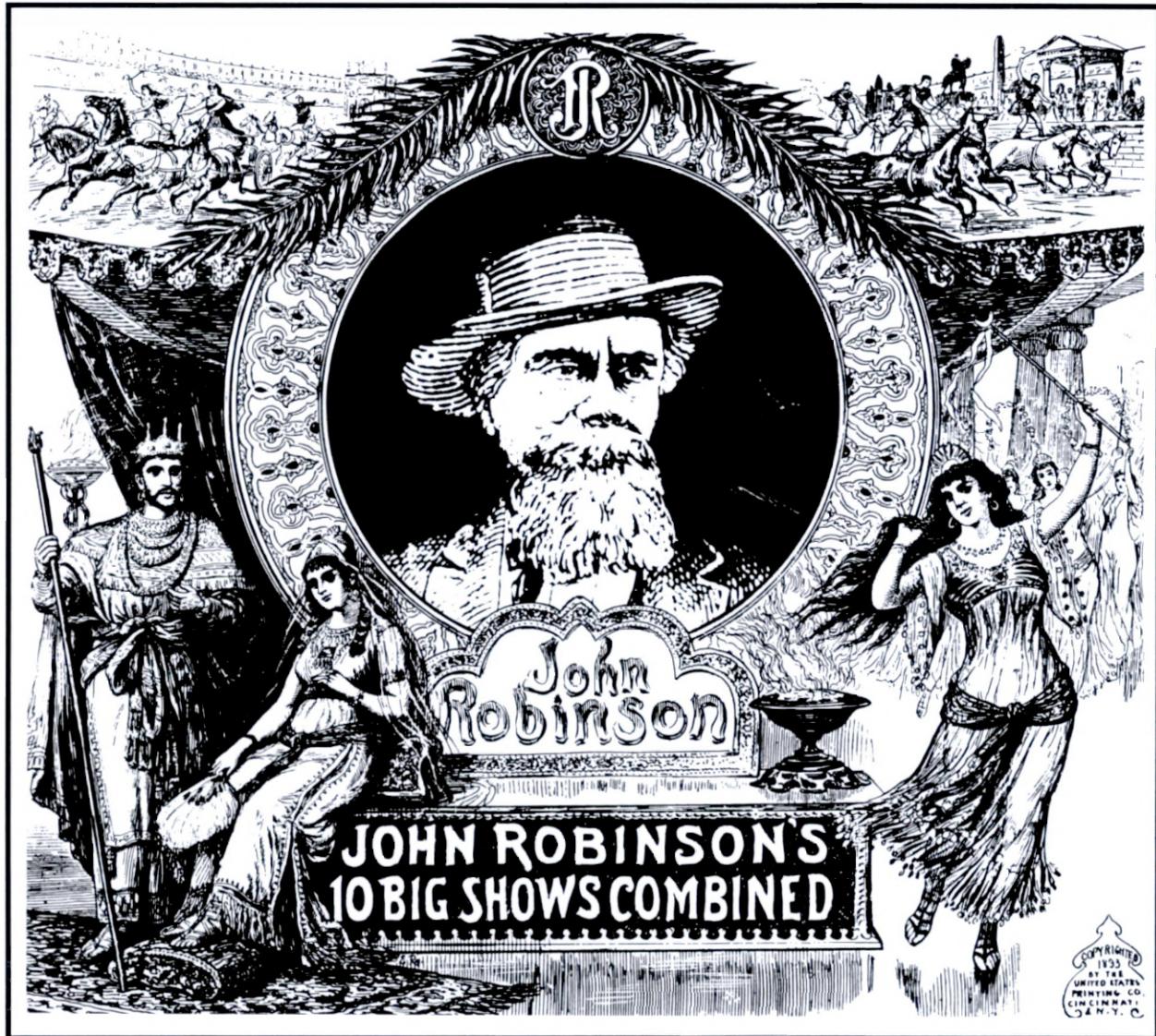
WARD HALL  
P. O. Box 907, Gibsonton, FL 33534

Holiday Greetings  
and Best Wishes

Joe and Marion McKeon



MERRY CHRISTMAS  
AND  
HAPPY NEW YEAR



FROM  
JOHN ROBINSON CIRCUS  
FAMILY

During the winter of 1940-41 Bud Anderson's show, quartered at Emporia, Kansas, prepared for its third season. First news of the show appeared in the February 1, 1941 *Billboard* reporting that Mrs. Anderson was in St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City recovering from a major operation on December 30. Bud was living in that city until she was released from the hospital. Mrs. Norman Anderson, who also underwent a major operation January 2, was recovering at St. Mary's Hospital in Emporia.

It mentioned that building at the quarters was progressing under direction of Loren Doyle. Several new cages and trailers had been completed. Capt. Hart was breaking a mixed wild animal group to be a feature of the coming season.

The February 4, 1941 Emporia *Gazette* reported: "A three ring circus, featuring animal acts exclusively, is planned for the 1941 season by Bud Anderson, Emporia circus man. New animal acts are being trained at the circus headquarters 1 1/2 miles east of Emporia on Highway 30S.

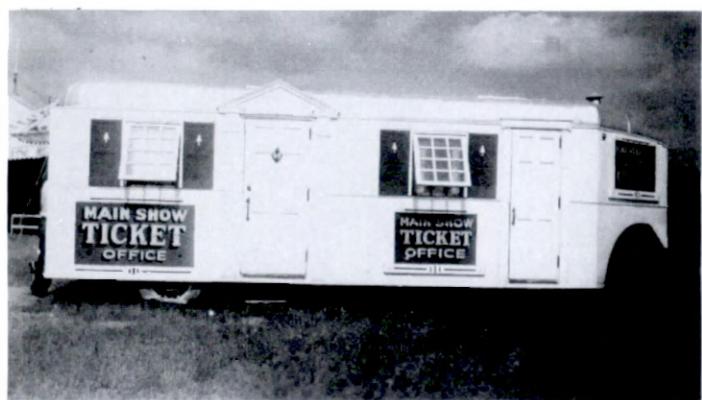
A steel arena for the center ring of the Anderson circus has been secured. Capt. John Hart, veteran wild animal trainer is putting lions, leopards and other wild animals through their routines.

"Mr. Anderson reports he is dealing for several other animal acts. The circus' camels also are being trained for ring appearances.

"An exclusive animal circus is the idea for the coming season," Anderson said. "We will have few performers other than the clowns and band members."

"Many of the animals of the Anderson circus are under contract for appearances the week of April 14 in a Shrine circus at Omaha, Nebraska. The contract calls for seven elephants, eleven horses and eight

The white cottage ticket wagon was new to the Anderson show in 1941. Illinois State University Library Special Collections.



duct the newly uniformed eight piece band.

The same issue contained this ad: "Wanted, man to work my liberty horses and menage. Capable of training same. Will pay cash for animal acts that don't conflict, or hire same. Bud Anderson Circus, Emporia, Kansas."

The show's elephant herd consisted of the same seven that finished the 1940 season, Gentry Babe, Eva, Modoc, Empress, Judy, Bonnie, and India.

On April 4 the *Gazette* reported: "All the performing

horses, ponies, mules and cage animals of the Bud Anderson's circus will be trucked from the show's Emporia winter quarters April 12 to Omaha, Nebraska. Mr. Anderson has a \$2,000 contract to furnish acts for a six day Shrine circus, which opens April 14.

The Omaha Shrine circus is a gala event. Eight large pictures of animals and scenes of the Anderson circus appeared in last Sunday's rotogravure section of the *Omaha World-Herald*. The pictures were taken about two weeks ago. The pictures included one of Mr. Anderson seated in his silver mounted saddle on the back of his Arabian horse, Shiek. Another picture was of the large elephant, India, riding her tricycle.

Five semi-trailer trucks and two cage trucks will take the acts to Omaha. About fifteen circus employees are to be used in Omaha.

The February issue of *White Tops*, a circus journal, carried a story on the Anderson circus. Trucks, cages and some animals have been owned by many shows. The Anderson show equipment represents former property of six circuses, some of them now out of the business. Circuses from which properties and animals came include Cole Bros., Norris Bros., Tom Mix, Col. Tim McCoy, the

Anderson semi-trailer No. 101 and camels in 1941. Illinois State University Library Special Collections.



The side show bannerline in Parie du Chien, Wisconsin on June 1, 1941. Illinois State University Library Special Collections.

Kuhn circus and the Jack Hoxie circus."

The April 12 *Billboard* advised that the Joe Hodgini riding act had been contracted for the coming season. The program other than that act would be exclusively an animal show. Performances were to be given in two rings and a steel arena. The concert was to feature Anderson, and eight cowboys and cowgirls. New trucks had been added as well as a new business coupe for Mrs. Wilcox. Anderson said the side show top, a 60 with three 30s would house all the animals. Opening day was to be about April 20. This was later changed to May 2.

On April 19 the *Gazette* reported: "The 1941 season of the Bud Anderson circus is scheduled to open in Emporia Friday and Saturday May 2 and 3 on the Katy showgrounds.

"Most of the circus animals and 32 employees have been in Omaha this week. This is the reason for the opening of the spring road season later than usual.

"The outstanding feature will be a series of wild animal acts under the direction of Capt. John Hart, in a steel arena in the center ring. Various combinations of wild animals will be used in the arena, not to be dismantled between acts. One group includes lions, tigers and cougars, and another features small elephants, lions and tigers.

"One of the acts is the Hodgini riding troupe of four members, using their own horses, which recently was booked by the St. Louis Police circus.

"Anderson's circus this year will tour states east of the Mississippi River and bookings are being made by the circus' general agent Jackie Wilcox.

"From Emporia the circus will move to Kansas City. Before leaving the

Greater Kansas City area, the show will exhibit in Rosedale and Armourdale."

The 1941 circus season had now arrived. Two railroaders, Ringling-Barnum on 90 cars and Cole Bros. on 25 cars headed the field. Wallace Bros. and Russell Bros. were the largest motorized shows, followed by Anderson, Mills Bros. Yankee Patterson, Dailey Bros., Kelly-Miller, Hunts, Lewis Bros., Kay Bros., Sparton Bros., Tiger Bill, Bell Bros., and a few other smallies.

The national defense effort was in full swing. The draft of young men for the armed services was working well. New camps and posts to house them were going up everywhere. The populace had more money to spend on circuses and the season was expected to be good, despite severe summer heat and polio outbreaks in parts of the country. In Europe and North Africa World War II was going strong and increased when German armies invaded the Soviet Union in late June. Roosevelt was entering his third term as president, but few believed he could keep out of war as pledged, no more than Wilson in 1917. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7 ended all speculation.

The Anderson circus opened in Emporia for a two day stand, May 2-3. It then

A new letterhead was used in 1941. It is printed in red, blue and gold. Pfening Archives.



The Anderson horse top and dressing room in 1941. The canvas came from the 1938 McCoy show. Illinois State University Library Special Collections.

made a 132 mile Sunday run to Kansas City, Missouri for four days, May 5-8.

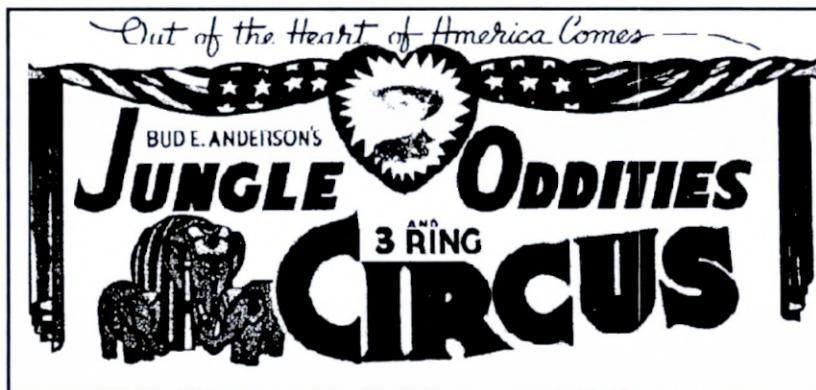
On May 5 the *Gazette* reported: "Bud Anderson's circus, after exhibiting to 5,000 persons on a home town lot in Emporia Friday and Saturday, pulled up stakes and early Sunday morning left for North Kansas City. The maiden jump of the season's tour was not without a mishap.

"Four miles north of Ottawa, on Highway 50S, an animal truck, with partitioned cages, driven by Leslie Garner, turned over into a ditch. The truck carried cages of smaller animals. During the delay of part of the circus caravan, another cageful of animals, two lions, a leopard, a hyena, several monkeys and an American wolf-roared and howled. They were in an awkward position in the ditch for two hours. Then Babe, the circus' 8,500 pound elephant, used her head and harness and pulled the truck back on the highway. None of the animals in the overturned cage was injured. The driver was not hurt.

"About 1,000 persons saw each of the afternoon and evening performances of the show here. Among the outstanding acts to which the spectators responded warmly were those of the elephants. The varied routine of the three elephants under the direction of Capt. Matt Laurish, was tops.

The equestrian acts of the Hodgini troupe also pleased the lovers of horse flesh. They got more good enchainment from frisky Shetland ponies.

"A worth while feature of the circus this year is the well trained wild animal acts in which Capt. John Hart works unusual combinations of animals in a steel arena."





Capt. John Hart and his wife in front of a wild animal cage in 1941. Pfening Archives.

An article about the cage in the ditch also appeared in the May 5 Kansas City *Times*.

The *Billboard* did not publish an opening review. In fact no news was printed during May other than this advertisement in the May 24 issue: "Bud Anderson Circus Wants. Clowns, stewart who can cook for about 100 people. Useful people all departments, Ft. Madison, May 22, Wapello, May 23, West Liberty, May 24, all Iowa."

After Kansas City the show returned to Kansas to play Atchison and Leavenworth, then went back into Missouri for ten dates. A tour of Iowa began May 22 at Fort Madison and concluded at Postville on May 31. A month long tour of Wisconsin started June 1 at Prairie du Chien ended at Eagle River June 30.

A report in the June 7 *Billboard* was headlined: "Best Season Yet for Bud Anderson." Dated Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, May 31 it said the circus has enjoyed the best business in its history this spring. The show was scheduled to play its first date in Wisconsin here June 1.

Bill Wilcox in charge of the advance brigade was using two trucks and three men, Harry Bailey, Bill Page, Pappy Ross.

The Joe Hodgini riding act on Anderson in 1941. Pfening Archives.

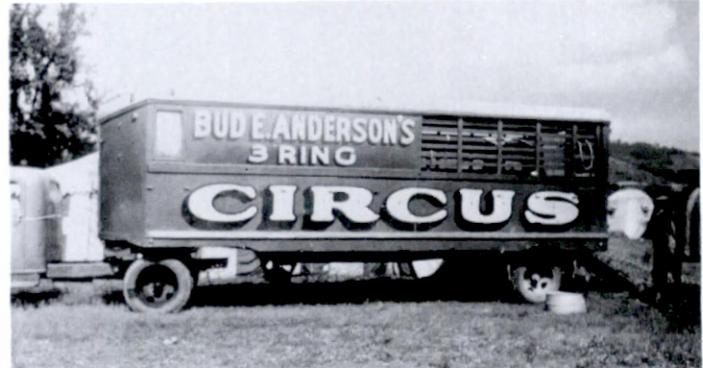


Beside the regular billing they were taking up Jumbo cards and using two styles of special pictorial easel backed window cards.

A full review of the show appeared in the June 21 *Billboard*: "Anderson in Wisconsin; business holds up." Dated Dodgeville, Wisconsin, June 14 it read: "Making a fast trek northeast from Emporia, Kansas, where it opened May 2-3, the Bud E. Anderson Circus completed its first month out last week when it entered Wisconsin at Prairie du Chien for several weeks. Business has been very good, although heavy rains put the damper on a few stands in eastern Iowa.

"The organization travels on 35 units, 21 of which are special-built semis, seven being new this year with a new cottage type ticket wagon. The show carries about 40 head of ring stock. Big show top interior is a blaze of red, white, and blue. Three beautiful new ring clothes, made up of an immense blue star on a white background with a three foot circle border of red, are left in place until the grand entry has completed its tour. A new steel arena with a red, white, and blue canopy instead of the conventional net, occupied the 40 foot center ring. A red, white, and blue back door drop and the same colored cloth hanging from the railing, separating seats from the track, complete a dazzling dressing up of the big show top. All attendants are in uniform. Anderson is having difficulty finding a new big top due to the national emergency. He is temporarily using a two year old 80 with three 40 foot middles.

"The performance is tremendously strong and audiences are very enthusiastic. It moves rapidly and smoothly under the direction of Bert Rickman. C. S. Brooks and his excellent ten piece band add the finishing touches. It is almost an all animal show other than



Horse semi-trailer in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin on June 1, 1941. Illinois State University Library Special Collections.

a few excellent aerial and ground acts to round out the bill.

"The Program. Display No. 1. Grand entry, larger this year and dressed up to make a riot of action and color. No. 2-Baby bull, pony, and Great Dane trios in Rings 1 and 3. No. 3. Captain Hart's Military Lions in arena. No. 4. Clowns on track, Charlie Dryden, helped by entire troupe. No. 5. Martha Flore's mixed group of performing wild animals in arena. No. 6. Concert announcement by Joe Webb. No. 7. The Marcells, high perch, Ring 3, and Charlie Dryden's troupe of jugglers in Ring 1. No. 8. Anderson's troupe of performing elephants worked by Matt Laurish and assistants. No. 9. Swinging ladders high above the track featuring Mlle. Petite and Miss Maier. No. 10. The late Max Gruber's elephant, Eva, worked through her novelty routine of tire walking, bowling etc. This act is dressed up tremulously and Eva has a glittering new robe in which to strut her stuff. No. 11. Anderson six pony drill worked by Matt Laurish. No. 12. Head carry by the ponderous elephant, Babe, and Matt Laurish around the hippodrome track. No. 13. Clowns in center ring. Dime Wilson's emotional extravaganza, poetry at its best. No. 14. Joe Hodgini, bareback riding. A rare combination of skill and comedy. No. 15. Barth and Maier, novelty teeterboard act. No. 16. Anderson's Military Mules in an amazing drill exhibition. No. 17. Clowns on the track. Dime Wilson shows the boys the high jump. No. 18. Menage. Array of high school and dancing horses. No. 19. Second concert announcement. No. 20. The Hodgini Troupe in an entertaining bareback Indian number. No. 21. Grand Patriotic finale.

"The concert is holding from 75 to 90 percent of the big show crowd. Anderson, mounted on his white Arabian stallion, Sheik, and using his famous silver saddle is introduced. The act is an exhibition of fancy riding followed by an elephant number by little India, worked by Matt

Laurish. Anderson also gives an exhibition of fancy rope spinning and 1, 2, 3 horse catches.

"Menagerie consists of seven cages of wild animals, bull line of seven, three camels, and a large monkey land on leashes.

"Staff: Bud E. Anderson, owner and manager; Joe B. Webb, assistant manager; Mrs. Bud Anderson, treasurer; Mrs. Espy, secretary; Bert Rickman, equestrian director; Al Martin, superintendent of front door; Lorin Doyle, boss mechanic; Joe Applegate, boss canvasman; Ty Cobb, steward; Matt Laurish, menagerie superintendent; Frank Ashby, superintendent ring stock; Frank Ellis, public relations; Sandy Schlee, superintendent side show canvas; Leo Bennett, side show manager; Al McCabe, buyer; Bernard Crawford, superintendent of privileges; Jackie Wilcox, general agent; Bill Wilcox, brigade manager; Clarence Fisher, boss electrician; Norman Anderson, advertising banners, and Charlie Dryden, producing clown, with Dime Wilson, Jimmy Goodwin, Clarence Meyer, and Henie Blass

"Side show: Steve Williams, fire eater; Cleo Bennett, mentalist; Robert Reynolds, vent; Miss Galien, snakes; Glenn Martingale, magic; Inez Cullen, sword walker; Dale Thom, Punch; Ina Knight and Peggy Bloekur, dancers.

"Band: C. S. Brooks leader and trumpet; C. D. Vanvactor and Tommy Osborne, trumpets, Chester Espy and Clint Steward, trombones; Louis Melton and Dick Ward, baritones; H. Bunn, bass; Fred Franklin, drums, and Tony Scofield, clarinet."

Sverre O. Braathen, a prominent circus fan, wrote in the June-July 1941 *White Tops* that he and his wife caught Anderson's circus at Prairie du Chien on June 1 to fix up the ton mile and license tags for the show.

Braathen noted Anderson was using an old Tim McCoy Wild West show blue and white striped tent for a side show and

The other Capt. Hart wild animal cage on Anderson in 1941. Illinois State University Library Special Collections.



The Anderson red ticket semi-trailer and marquee in 1941. Pfening Archives.

other McCoy tents for the padroom. He said the outfit looked good on the lot and equipment was in fine condition. The interior of the big top looked very good with red, white, and blue curtains extending all the way around the hippodrome track in front of the seats.

Braathen also gave a brief summary of the program about the same as listed in the *Billboard*, except he did not mention the military mules act. He did list an eight horse liberty act. He also mentioned a wire act by one of the Hodginis which was not in the *Billboard* review. Braathen counted eight ponies instead of six. Matt Laurish worked three elephants in the center ring and Captain Hart used four lions in his number. He commented there was a very fine after show featuring Anderson in a fancy roping exhibition and the educated elephant, Eva, that adds, subtracts, multiplies figures and does other educational tricks.

Anderson moved into Michigan at Iron River on July 1 and played seventeen consecutive stands before returning to Wisconsin at Iron River on July 19. The last date in Michigan was at Ironwood. Only one Wisconsin stand was played before moving to Minnesota at Cloquet on July 20. Twenty-four stands were played in that state, the final coming at Austin on August 14.

Only two short articles appeared in July *Billboards*. The July 5 issue noted that

Guy Blackburn, who had been with Anderson's old Seal Bros. Circus for six years, was back again working the side show and big show. The July 19 issue said that Billroy's Comedians day and dated Anderson at Manistique, Michigan on July 5 and the shows exchanged courtesies.

On July 22 the Emporia *Gazette* reported: "Bud Anderson writes from Ironwood, Michigan, that his circus is enjoying a profitable season in its tour through the northern states. The circus is playing large as well as small towns and next Saturday is booked at Grand Rapids. Press comments in Michigan laud the performing of the show's seven elephants and the wild animal acts.

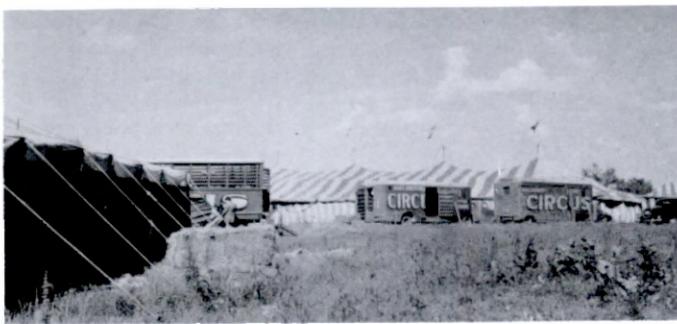
The circus' three horse liberty act is booked for an eleven day engagement in the Detroit, Michigan, auditorium, starting August 27. Anderson will present the act there."

Anderson had placed a small classified ad in the Emporia *Gazette* on June 20 offering his farm for sale. The August 8 *Gazette* commented on the possible sale of his Emporia property: "Bud Anderson, is considering abandoning Emporia as the winter quarters for his circus animals and property. He is advertising the circus farm and buildings for sale.

The reason for wanting to leave Em-

The Anderson 1941 blue and white big top. The canvas came from the Tim McCoy show. Illinois State University Library Special Collection.





The Anderson back yard in Dodgeville, Wisconsin in 1941. Pfening Archives.

poria, Mr. Anderson reports, is that the climate is too cold here for some of the circus animals.

"I have lost several expensive animals in winter quarters," Anderson wrote the *Gazette*, 'and I think it was because of cold weather.'

"If Anderson does not sell his home and the tract with the circus barns at a fair price, he plans to winter the circus here again."

The August 16 *Billboard* had an update on recent Anderson activities with a piece headlined, "Michigan good for Anderson, giving fair business."

"Breckenridge, Minnesota, August 9—The Bud Anderson Circus, after touring the upper peninsula of Michigan for three weeks is playing western and southern Minnesota. Joe B. Webb, assistant manager reports very satisfactory business in Michigan, but the intense heat and harvesting activities have curtailed business since entering Minnesota. Detroit Lakes on July 30 gave a fair matinee and fine attendance at night. Fergus Falls, July 31, was the banner day of recent stands. Breckenridge, August 1, had a very light matinee and half house at night. From Minnesota the show goes southeast toward Iowa. A new 40 foot big show top middle was broken in here."

"Anderson has contracted to work his eight horse liberty act at the Michigan State Fair himself. During his absence, Joe B. Webb and Mrs. Anderson were to manage the show. Frank Anders is acting as legal adjuster. A new Chevrolet panel truck sound car had been purchased recently to replace the one that was wrecked." This was the first mention of Anders being on the show.

An interesting article appeared in the August-September 1941 *White Tops* titled "On the Lot with Bud Anderson Circus," by P. M. Sillway. Some of his observations and comments were: "The interior of the big top is attractively decorated with red, white, and blue and each of the rings has a showy ground cloth in patriotic colors. The same big top is used as last season but has a new 40 foot middle. A steel

arena is installed in the center ring for Capt. John Hart's jungle animal acts. The program is mostly different from that of last season with equestrian and animal acts predominating.

"Seven performing elephants are an outstanding feature of the circus. The group is headed by Eva, the famous Max Gruber soloist, which does a fifteen minute routine practically without any coaching whatsoever, attended by Anderson. In her routine she presented a bowling stunt of three turns, chalking up the score for each throw and after the third turn backing up and knocking over the standing pins with her hind feet. Then there is a trio of bulls in a posing and pyramiding act, unsurpassed in any circus arena, directed by Matt Laurish and Moon Kincaid.

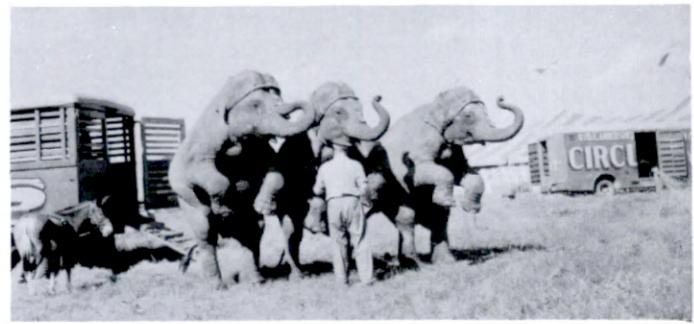
"Capt. John Hart has two dens of performing lions. Does not use a pistol at any time but directs the big jungle cats with only a cracking whip and a short blunt stick. Lions do a seesaw on a long plank, each single with him, then with each other.

"Outstanding feature is the Joe Hodgini equestrian family, Joe Sr., Joe Jr. and Tommie, a building equestrian star, two acts principal and Indian setting bareback riding, using four horses.

"Clowning are Dime Wilson, Charlie Dryden, juggler, and Jimmie Goodwin. Joe Hodgini Jr. does a classic act on the tight wire. Jennie Greer presents some nice work as a aerialist. Ring performance includes a group of eight handsome liberty horses, eight spotted Shetlands handled by Matt Laurish, and a group of five small military mules."

Anderson moved into Iowa at New Hampton on August 15, followed by Parkersburg the next day. It then played two full weeks in the state with the final stand coming at Farmington on August 30. A fifteen stand tour of Missouri followed, beginning at Monroe City on September first and concluding at Garthersville on the fifteenth. No reports appeared in the trade publication while Anderson was in Missouri or Iowa.

Moving southward the show went into Arkansas at Osceola on September 16. The longest jump of the season was from



Three of the Anderson elephants in 1941. Pfening Archives.

Helena to Sheridan, Arkansas, traveling 132 miles. The Arkansas tour finished with a two day stand at Texarkana on September 26 and 27.

As the 1941 circus season moved into fall on its final leg, the nation's defense effort quickened. It was realized that shortages existed in certain materials, namely rubber, and metals. The manufacture of white sidewall tires was forbidden and scrap rubber drives began in many cities and conservation measures were urged on the public. Aluminum scrap drives were started. In order to conserve electrical power the government ordered a brownout, closing down certain unnecessary electrical signs including theater marquees. In the Far East economic measures aimed at Japanese aggressive moves led many observers to frankly predict war would come soon. However, it was German submarine activity in waters near the eastern coast and Roosevelt's order to shoot on sight that convinced most Americans that war was only months or weeks away. It was.

On September 29 Anderson's show moved into Oklahoma at Idabel with Hugo the next day. It was the last state played, with a lengthy twenty-seven stands.

The October 11 *Billboard* broke a long silence on Anderson activities reporting the show had encountered its first opposition of the season at Durant, Oklahoma on October 3. Russell Bros. played there on the 6th. Opposition turned up again at Ardmore with Anderson there on October 6 and Russell the next day. Another note said Bill Wilcox had copied an idea from the Ringling-Barnum show which used the sides of American Railway Express trucks for advertising. He tacked Anderson cards on cotton trucks in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

A *Billboard* report on Russell Bros. activities a little later mentioned that the show Sunday on October 5 at Seminole, Oklahoma and that several of the personnel visited the Anderson show which gave a matinee only at Madill that day af-

ter being rained out on its scheduled show date the day before. (The Anderson route sheet lists Madill scheduled for Saturday October 4 when in reality because of the rain out that day stayed over and presented a matinee only on Sunday.) Russell visitors included Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Webb, owners, Bill and Edna Antes, Justus Edwards, and Mr. and Mrs. Walter Jennier.

An advertisement in the October 18 *Billboard* read: "At liberty, after November 1 and for season of 1942 for fairs, Shrine dates, or anything that pays, three different elephant acts by seven elephants, liberty horses, high school horses, ponies, and mules. Any part or all for your dates. Bud E. Anderson, Emporia, Kansas." This was the first suggestion that Anderson did not plan to tour in 1942.

An article in the October 25 *Billboard* indicated a change had been made in Anderson's general agent. "Ed Miller, general agent, reported the Anderson show was scheduled to close on October 30 at Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Miller has been with Anderson since leaving Ken Maynard in Atlantic City, August 31."

This was the only mention of Miller's connection with Anderson. Possibly he came aboard to help Jackie Wilcox with contracting duties, or perhaps she had left entirely. In any event the show's closing date was changed. It played Bartlesville on October 28 and finished the season the next day, October 29.

The October 30 *Emporia Gazette* reported: "Bud Anderson will come home to winter quarters in Emporia next week. The circus will give its final show of the season at Fredonia, Sunday afternoon and then will head for the home lot.

"We have had another good season," Anderson wrote to the *Gazette*. "I celebrated my 46th birthday the 25th and I can ride a horse as good as I ever could, and also throw a rope. I put on my wild west concert myself away from home all the time this year, as my health is much better than it has been for about three years."

"Anderson got into familiar territory early this week when his show moved into Pawhuska, Oklahoma for Monday performances. The *Pawhuska Journal-Capital* told the story: 'Sunday morning when the Bud Anderson circus moved across the Arkansas River into Osage county, the show brightened up and started looking for landmarks.'

"Because-well. Bud Anderson worked as a cowpoke in the Osage over 25 years ago and either worked for or knew all the old timers in this county."

"In his deluxe trailer office at the show grounds Sunday afternoon he talked about the early days of Pawhuska and other places in Osage county where as a youngster he had worked around the cow

camps, and asked about the people he knew from uncounted campfires in the roundups and line riding.

"Anderson came to this county about 1912 and worked for the Stonebreaker interests in Foraker area, then went to Ralston for a while and worked for Louis Oiler.

"Ben Jones, who is now a foreman for the Chapman-Barnard ranch, will remember the many nights in the Osage

es to work, the circus operated short-handed nearly all season," Anderson said.

"The circus had some storm losses and one horse in the show's eight horse liberty act died of sleeping sickness. Another horse was bought to continue the act.

"Mr. Anderson reports that the outlook for the 1942 small circus season is indefinite because of the draft and possible difficulty in getting tent canvas and billboard advertising.

"I will be in the show business next year," Anderson said, "but I can't tell now to what extent."

Capt. Hart and his six lions returned to Emporia with the show. With no booking scheduled Hart and his critters camped inside the city limits. The December 4 *Weekly Gazette* reported: "Residents in the northeast part of Emporia will rest more easily when six lions, quartered in cages with heavy steel bars at 1213 East Street are moved to a new location. They will be moved as soon as their owner, Captain Hart, who last season presented a wild animal act with Bud Anderson's Circus, can find a place to put them."

"Colored residents in the Northeast part of town have complained that the roars of lions have been 'scaring them stiff,' police said.

"Police investigated the lions' quarters on several occasions after complaints were filed. However not all residents of the neighborhood are worried about the lions, according to Bert Rich, colored, 1202 Sylvan. 'I live across the alley from the lions,' Mr. Rich said. 'They are nice peaceful lions and they don't open their heads, except when they are being fed. They are kept in good cages with strong bars and they are no bother.'

"Capt. Hart feeds the lions a lot of meat and they shouldn't be run out of town, for business reasons. It is planned to have the lions put on a show in their steel arena in the Civic auditorium sometime during the winter."

"But still there are complaints. Police say the lions must leave the city limits and Captain Hart is looking for a place." One wonders why Hart and his assemblage had not been on the Anderson farm all the while.

Anderson booked his animal acts out as soon as he returned to quarters. The December 5 *Gazette* reported: "A baby elephant, dog and pony act of Anderson's circus has been booked for a two week's engagement in Chicago at the R.K.O. Palace theater starting December 27. The animals will be sent from Emporia by truck on December 15."

"Two of the Anderson circus camels are now on Christmas parade tours in Iowa. Ten of the circus ponies are under lease to the Stanberry Attractions of Fort Dodge, Iowa, for Christmas parades and acts."



Bud Anderson in the backyard of his 1941 circus. Pfening Archives.

when he worked with Bud Anderson, the circus man says.

"But, those old timers who now survive will not recognize Bud's riding outfit these days. The silver saddle that Bud sits in as he rides Tonto, the Arabian horse that has only a few flecks of brown on his ears to mar the snow-whiteness of the glass-eyed animal.

"But the Bud Anderson underneath the 10 gallon Stetson is the same Bud Anderson that rode over the rolling hills for ten years and knows the Osage backwards and forwards."

The November 6 *Gazette* noted: "Bud Anderson's Circus, now in winter quarters, had a more profitable season this year than in 1941," Mr. Anderson reports.

"The show, which closed a six months' tour last week, had excellent business in the Great Lakes country. Business in Oklahoma for three weeks at the close of the season was bad because of continued rains and muddy lots."

"The season's best town for Anderson was Ashland, Wisconsin, which provided capacity crowds. The circus exhibited many towns in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin and also covered parts of Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas, Oklahoma and a few Kansas towns."

"Because of the draft and better chanc-

"A truck load of circus seats will be sent to Morris County next week to be used for a public sale of Hereford cattle, next Thursday."

Shortly after the first of the year Anderson announced his plans for 1942. The January 8, 1942 *Gazette* reported: "Bud Anderson, has decided not to take his motorized circus on the road this year because of the war and the tire rationing program.

"In an advertisement in the *Gazette*, Mr. Anderson is offering fourteen trucks, seven semi-trailers and three electric light plants for sale.

"Because of uncertainty of business and the tire rationing, which probably would make it impossible or difficult for me to keep my circus moving, I have decided not to open the show this season and to sell the equipment," Anderson said.

"Anderson does not plan to dispose of his animals. He plans to book some of the animals at fairs, indoor circuses and other amusement events during the coming season.

"Mr. Anderson, who has been in show business for about 25 years, recalls that the circus business was good during the first World War, but he believes conditions are different now."

In the meantime Pearl Harbor came Sunday, December 7, 1941 and the U. S.

was in World War II. The *Billboard's* annual circus season review appeared in the December 27 issue. The story noted that although some shows didn't have record tours, overall the season was exceptionally good.

The January 24, 1942 *Billboard* noted: "Because of the war and tire rationing, Fred E. (Bud) Anderson has announced that his Jungle Oddities and Wild Animal Circus will stay in quarters in Emporia this season. He plans to use some animal acts for fairs, indoor circuses and other amusements.

"Anderson's quarters are on his farm three miles from Emporia and he lives in a modern house there. He has not announced if he will farm his land this season or rent it as in the past."

A February *Billboard* reported that several indoor and fair dates had already been signed for Anderson's performing animal unit. The training barns were working daily breaking new stock and practicing the old. All the acts were to be presented by Matt Laurish and Anderson. Four animal and property men were in quarters.

Anderson later announced that he had a good schedule of Police and Shrine circus engagements and fairs booked for some of his animals and acts. Three elephants, worked by Matt Laurish, were

contracted for the Kansas City Shrine circus March 2 to 7. The bulls worked the Atlanta Pan American circus opening March 10. The March 26 *Gazette* reported that Anderson did not collect a large part of the \$1,200 contract. He had been assured by the sponsoring organization that the bill would be paid. The elephant act later played the Omaha, Nebraska, Shrine show in May.

Thus, after three seasons, Bud Anderson's Jungle Oddities and Three Ring Circus was no more. For 1942 he kept three elephants, Eva, Bonnie, and India. Gentry Babe was leased to Atterbury Bros. Circus. Modoc, Empress, and Judy went to Terrell Jacobs. Later the other three elephants were sold, as was much of the equipment.

Anderson's days as a circus owner were far from over. He remained idle for a single season and in 1943 was back with his own show, making a short tour that year and full seasons in 1944 and 1945. The 1944 and 1945 Anderson shows were covered in an article by the author in the July-August 1989 *Bandwagon*.

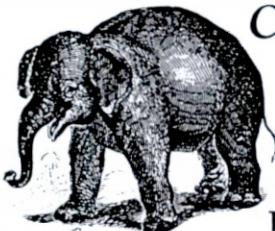
Some material for this article came from Norman Anderson, Orin C. King, the Lyon County, Kansas Historical Society, the Circus World Museum and the Pfening Archives.

## FAMOUS COLE INDOOR VARIETY CIRCUS

Christmas & Happy New Year  
From  
Elida Entertainment Inc.  
Ron & Willene Bacon  
Larry & Cheryl Allmon



# IMPORTANT AUCTION



## CIRCUS/WILD WEST SHOW Mail/Telephone

Auction Closing February 14, 1995

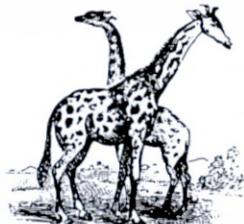
### Circus Memorabilia

Formerly the Property of

Robert F. Reynolds: RBBB Prop & Safety Manager

Leif O. Osmundsen: Ringling Brothers "BIG TOP" Maker

Irving & Phyllis Nelson: Circus Personalities



### Includes:

Selections from 26 Different Circuses

Articles & Clippings • Autographs • Big Top Mechanical Drawings

Contracts • Documents • Letterheads • Magazines • Newspapers

Osmundsen's Personal Sewing Kit & Sewing Machine

(1000+) Photo's • Posters • Prints • Programs • Route Books •

Route Cards • Tickets...and more!



## WILD WEST SHOW MEMORABILIA

Formerly the property of

Alf Reickoff: World Champion Trick Shooter

### Includes:

Autographs • Award Medals (28; mostly gold) • Broadsides

Correspondence (many significant names 1902-1910 era) • Covers

Cowboy Star Photographs • Posters • Programs • Rifle (Reickoffs special order 1890 Winchester Gallery rifle) • Targets • Tickets

Throwing Knives ... and more!



Historically Significant and exciting  
Approximately 600 lots...2000 items

Profusely Illustrated Catalog

Most credit cards accepted



Kurt R. Krueger • P.O. Box 275 • Iola, WI 54945  
Phone (715) 445-3845 • FAX (715) 445-4100

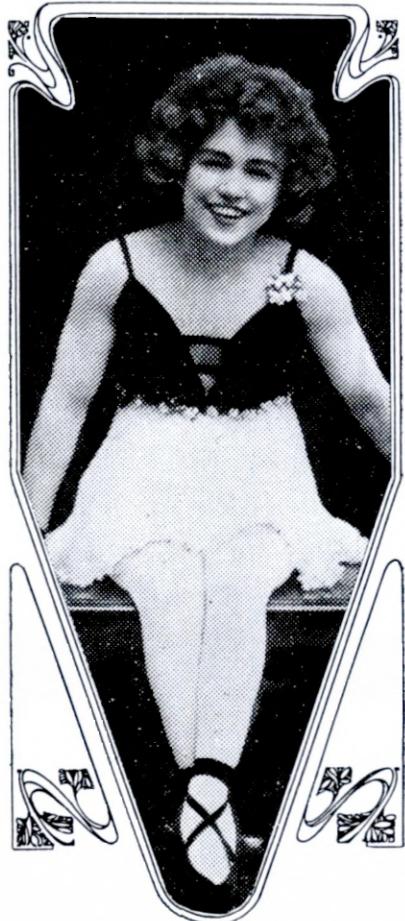
• Choice Consignments Wanted: Any Topic •

**M**onroe, Michigan, seat of the county of the same name, lies thirty-five miles south of Detroit and twenty-five miles north of Toledo, Ohio. These, as we know, are two of the type of cities the circus preferred, filled as they were by mostly religious, immigrant people with large families who were attracted to popular entertainment. Henry Ringling North quoted his uncle John as saying, "The stork is the circus man's best friend," and it was just such cities as Detroit and Toledo that he was thinking of, if he said that.

The distances we mentioned were a day's haul for a wagon show, thus, a company going from Toledo to Detroit, or *vice versa* would stop at Monroe. Since eighty per-cent of the circuses playing Toledo also played Detroit, this gave Monroe an exposure to performances beyond what its size would ordinarily warrant.

In 1840 the town had a population of 1,703 and two years later saw its first

Fig. 1. Lillian Leitzel was the subject of the first notice of the Ringling show in *Monroe News Courier*. Pfening Archives.



Lillian Leitzel Coming With Ringling Bros.

# RINGLING BROTHERS IN MONROE, MICHIGAN IN JUNE 1916

By Stuart Thayer

show, the western unit of June, Titus, Angevine & Co. The 1850 census awarded Monroe some 2,813 citizens and by then five aggregations had pitched their tents in the place, including the first circus to advertise its presence, Howes & Co. in 1847. By 1860, when the Great Buckley Show paid a visit, the number of people had increased to 3,892. In the sixties such well-known companies as those of Robinson & Lake, Lewis B. Lent, Dan Rice, and Haight & Chambers all appeared for a day.

Once the larger circuses took to the railroads, Monroe was brushed aside as too small to bother with. The sixty-miles between Toledo and Detroit was an short night's run for a railer. As a consequence, the Barnum show played Monroe but twice (1872 and 1880) and Forepaugh and Forepaugh-Sells once each (1880 and 1905). Ben Wallace stopped twice, with Great Wallace in 1884 and with Cook & Whitby in 1894.

An examination of the routes of these companies leading up to and going away from Monroe indicates that they used it as a transfer point to go from one railroad to another, for small as it was, Monroe was important to the operation of three railroads.

The town, named for the fifth President of the country, was settled about 1785 by French-Canadians who moved from Detroit to the mouth of the River Raisin (called that for the wild grapes that grew along it), where it flowed into Lake Erie. Its first commerce was a fur-trading post. Because of the rich soil between the river and Lake Erie sizable nursery operations flourished there, giving the town its nickname, "Floral City." In addition, the river attracted paper mills beginning in 1911, some of which still operate. It has evolved into a rural trading center, as are most county seats, and even today survives mostly in that mode. Larger industries - Monroe Shock Absorbers (1917) and Lazy-Boy Chairs (1923)-while originating in the town, have moved elsewhere, mostly for reasons of cheaper and less well-organized labor.

Its most famous son was George Armstrong Custer, a statue of whom graces a

spot near one of the downtown bridges over the Raisin. The most famous event in the town's history was a battle between Kentucky militia and Indians on the river's edge in 1812, now commemorated by a small park and the name of Kentucky Street. But it was the railroad connections that gave it a commercial life beyond what one might expect in such a small place.

The railroad that eventually became the Michigan Southern had Monroe as its eastern terminus and was originally to run to New Buffalo on Lake Michigan. By 1852 this line had reached Chicago. The Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad had Monroe as its southern terminus. The Michigan Central was begun in Detroit as another Chicago-bound road. Its connecting branch to Toledo went through Monroe.

Thus, when the Barnum show in 1872 needed to switch from the Lake Shore to

Fig. 2. The first ad appeared three weeks before the date of the stand, and was repeated every day until June 30. Author's collection.



Fig. 3. Two showgirls and a tiger were featured in the second hand-out, which was printed on June 12. Pfening Archives.

the Michigan Southern, it do so at Monroe. In 1880 it did the same thing in changing from the Lake Shore to the Michigan Central. Forepaugh, that same year, went from the Michigan Southern to the Pere Marquette in Monroe. In 1905 Forepaugh & Sells Brothers played the town when it switched from the Lake Shore to the Toledo, St. Louis and Kansas City Railroad.

In 1916 another railroad transfer was made at Monroe, and this time it was Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows. On June 30 of that year Ringling Brothers played Monroe for the first and only time in its history. By then, the town numbered about 8,000 persons, not too small for a Ringling stand, but of a size they would ordinarily avoid. In that same season they played in the likes of Huntsville, Alabama; Macomb, Illinois; Dennison, Iowa; and Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, all towns of a population comparable to Monroe. The show's preference, however, was for cities of at least 15,000, and most of their 1916 dates conformed to that size.

Changing from one railroad to another would not of itself necessitate playing the transfer town, of course. According to the *Monroe News Courier* of June 6, an un-

amed advance man of the circus proposed, during a visit in mid-May, that if the license fee of \$50 and the rent of \$100 on the city-owned lot were guaranteed the circus would play the town. The city fathers agreed to those terms. In the event, the twenty-four hour man got the license down to \$20.

They were to arrive from Elyria, Ohio on the New York Central and switch at Monroe to the Pere Marquette in order to play Flint and other central Michigan towns. They did not stop at Toledo or Detroit, the usual pattern, as they had appeared in those cities in May on their return from a visit to the east.

James F. Donaldson, one of the four newspaper representatives—we'd call them press agents today—a veteran of some fifteen years in the business, arrived in town on June 5 and immediately wired the show for an increase in billing expense. Apparently, he was unaware of the place until that day. He complimented the *News-Courier*, which quoted him as saying, "Are you sure this isn't printed in Toledo and sent up?" and added, "Surely Monroe should feel proud of such a paper right here under the eave troughs of Toledo and Detroit."

Donaldson was accompanied by twenty-five billers who proceeded to decorate the town with circus art. This was the first intimation that the citizenry had that the show was coming. Donaldson said that a second bill car would soon arrive and then, on June 20 there would be a third. The paper reports indicate that the third car (Car #3, of course) didn't actually arrive until June 23, just a week before the show was due.

On June 6 the local paper ran a press department handout that was accompanied by a photograph of Lillian Leitzel, then in her first year with the Ringling company (Fig. 1). The boiler plate provided by the show read:

Lilly Leitzel, world's greatest woman athlete, who brings the hearts of the spectators into their mouths as they watch her turn and twist and perform her astonishing, continuous revolutions while dangling from a single rope suspended in mid-air.

The first advertisement appeared in the paper on June 10 (Fig. 2).

This was of the traditional type and pointed out the numerical marvels that supposedly set Ringling Brothers apart from the competition. Also, as was the tradition, the numbers were mostly false. They claimed eighty-nine cars in five trains; 400 foreign artists; 108 cages; forty-one elephants, and sixty clowns. The reality was closer to eighty-three cars in four trains. The nine hundred and some employees were not all artists, nor foreign.

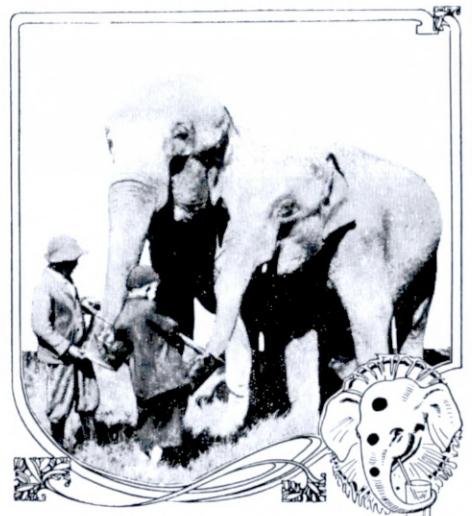


Fig. 4. Watering the elephants was suggested as a way of earning a ticket to the circus. The *News-Courier* printed this on June 22. Pfening Archives.

A second handout was printed in the *News Courier* on June 12. This was a photo of two unidentified showgirls (Fig. 3). The message in the piece was banal, and the appeal was obviously of the "cheesecake" variety, as we'd term it today.

The third of these appeared on June 22 (Fig. 4) and was concerned with boys bringing buckets of water to the elephants.

"Ask your mother for twenty-five cents to watch the elephants jump the fence.

They are so spry and jump so high,  
That they won't come down 'till the  
Fourth of July.

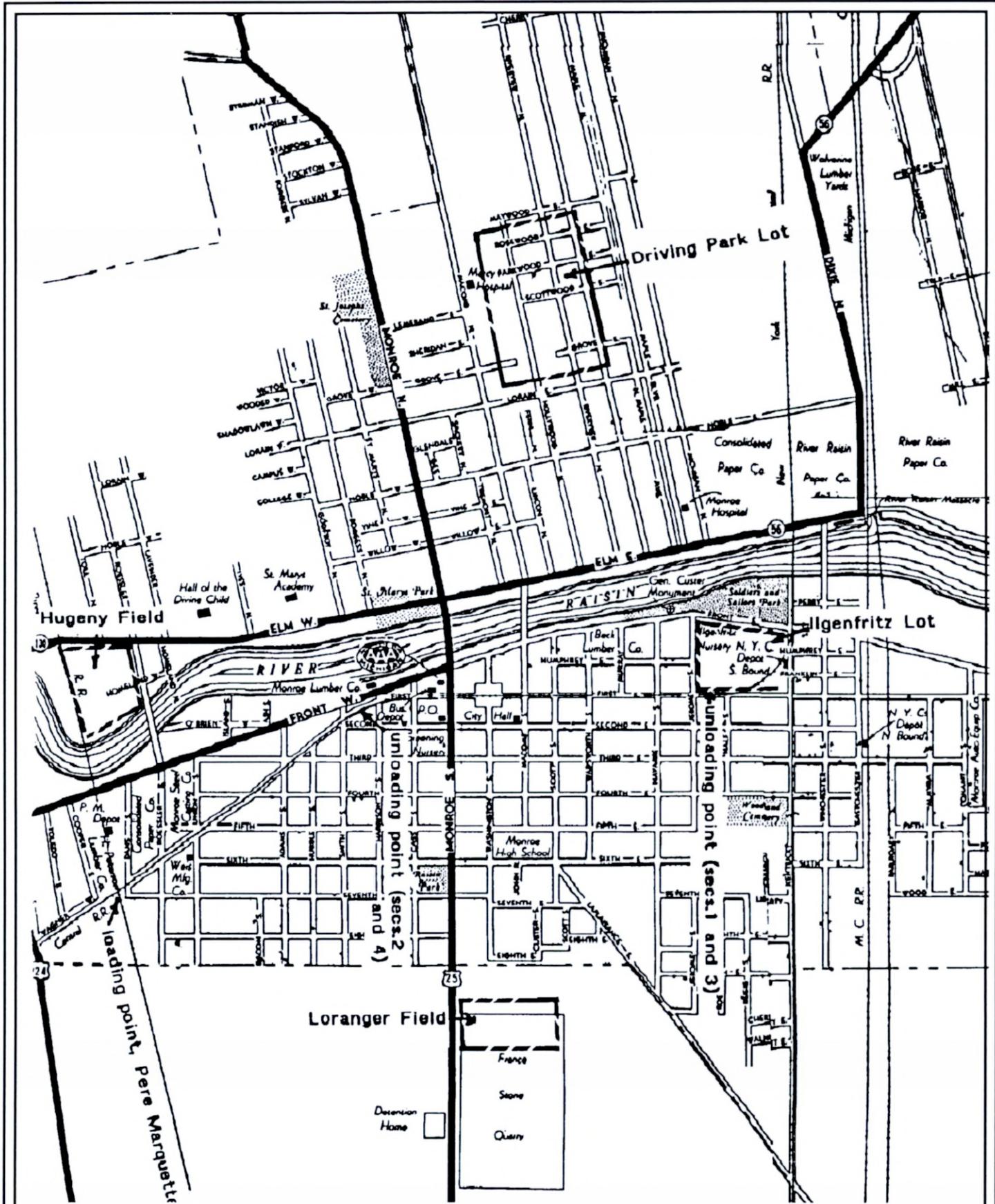
This bit of doggerel was accompanied by a description of the elephant herd, and especially of "Big Bingo," who was watered from a tank wagon rather than the efforts of the seventeen boys and three men it would have required if buckets were used.

On June 23, as we said, Advance Car #3 arrived in Monroe with agent C. G. Snowhill and 19 men. Fourteen of these ate breakfast in the hotel, but five were sent out so early they had to eat where they could. J. W. Grist went to surrounding towns and ate all three meals away from the crew. He spent forty cents on each repast, the limit the show allowed. He went ten miles to Carleton, where he hung twenty-six sheets, ten of them in one empty store. For these he gave up five passes. The rest of his day went like this:

Maybee (Fourteen miles), twenty-nine sheets, six passes.

Scofield (Twelve), two sheets, one pass.

Flat Rock (Seventeen), fourteen sheets (one daub), one pass.



Map of Monroe, Michigan, showing locations of unloading, loading and lots in 1916. Author's collection.

New Boston (Nineteen), twenty-one sheets, nine passes.

Romulus (Twenty-three miles), twenty-nine sheets, seven passes.

On his way back in Grist stopped at a rural pool hall and hung eight sheets that required two passes in exchange. Altogether, he hung 129 sheets, gave out thirty-three passes and charged the circus \$1.20 for meals.

Joe C. Donard, another lithographer, was assigned to the suburbs west of Detroit. He went to Ypsilanti (twenty-five miles from Monroe), Wayne (twenty-eight), Dearborn (thirty-one), and Plymouth (thirty-two). He hung 114 sheets, at a cost of twenty-one passes and charged the identical \$1.20 for three meals. In addition, Donard spent sixty-five cents for Interurban fares.

Adrian, Michigan, the next county seat to the west of Monroe, was a larger town, and a more likely place for a circus to play, as Ringling had done in 1905, 1908, and 1915. In our subject season the show sent W. J. Nunn to Adrian where he hung ninety-two sheets, most in large multiples in single locations. One tin shop accepted eighteen sheets, which we assume must have been on a blank wall. Nunn only ate dinner away from the crew, so we would guess that it was an afternoon's work. He gave out fifteen passes for the wall literature.

In Monroe itself, W. F. Gilbey found ten locations willing to have him embellish their windows. Daubs near railroad stations were popular with billers. Perhaps they attempted to impress their bosses, whom they knew would be arriving by train. Gilbey placed one four-sheet daub across from the New York Central depot, and another opposite the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern depot.

As a group, Snowhill's lithographer's ate twenty-five meals away from the car, at a cost to the show of \$10.00. They hung 379 sheets, for which they traded eighty-five tickets. Since this was the number 3 car, they were "mopping up," so to speak, finding places that the two previous crews had overlooked or where the owner couldn't be contacted.

The local merchants got into the spirit of the event on June 27. On that day ads appeared reminding the populace that circus day was approaching. During the last two weeks in June there was much news of the local National Guard company (K Company, 31st Michigan), which had been alerted for shipment to the Mexican border. This was, of course, the period of General Pershing's Punitive Expedition into Northern Mexico. Thus, the Luft-Bice Co. a local clothing store, ran an



Get Ready!  
NOT FOR THE BORDER—BUT FOR  
Circus Day  
AND THE  
4th of July

You purchase hand a new Suit. You can never be this more... a better  
of clothes or collar. You can depend on to be have the newest and the  
most styles are held. our robes are right and our prices are right.

You find every kind of men's and here, any price from \$1.00 to \$5.00 and get the best value the money will buy.

U. & A.  
Smart effect in the Newest Summer Shirts. An all silk shirt in many patterns. The sport shirt shirt is to  
and days and the best like shirt in Monroe.  
The water is here, get your thinking shirt now for Ladies' Men or Boys.

LUFT-BICE CO.

Fig. 5. Local merchants mentioned the circus beginning on June 27. Author's collection.

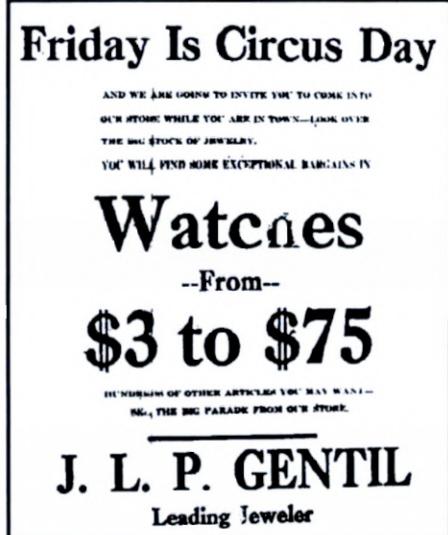
ad saying "Get Ready! Not for the Border, but for Circus Day." Among their offerings were Union Suits at \$1, and sport shirts at fifty cents. (Fig. 5).

J. L. P. Gentil, local jeweler cried "Friday is Circus Day," in his ad. He wanted to remind people to come into his store while they were in town. He had watches at from three to seventy-five dollars. "You may want to see the big parade from our store," he suggested (Fig. 6).

On Thursday, the day before circus day, a long show handout was printed, giving details of what the public might expect. The *Cinderella Spec* was described—1,000 actors on the largest stage ever constructed—and it was announced that the big trains would arrive at five a.m. A photo layout of an unloading was included. Also on Thursday the weather turned bad; a heavy rain inundated the area throughout the day.

Monroe lies on the ancient bed of what is now Lake Erie. Over the millennium, as

Fig. 6. Another ad tie-in by a local merchant. Author's collection.



Friday Is Circus Day

AND WE ARE GOING TO INVITE YOU TO COME INTO  
OUR STORE WHILE YOU ARE IN TOWN—LOOK OVER  
THE BIG STOCK OF JEWELRY.  
YOU WILL FIND SOME EXCEPTIONAL BARGAINS IN

Watches  
—From—  
\$3 to \$75

NUMBER OF OTHER ARTICLES YOU MAY WANT—  
IN, THE BIG PARADE FROM OUR STORE.

J. L. P. GENTIL  
Leading Jeweler

the water receded to its present level, a great layer of black loam was deposited, which accounts for the rich soil of the farmland in the county. It was because of this that the many nursery operations we previously mentioned were established in and near the town. Also because of this the land is barely above the level of the Lake, and it was not unusual for the town to be flooded in the spring. The combination of the River Raisin and Lake Erie and snow-melt has often been too much for the slight rise of ground on which Monroe stands. The local historical society files are filled with pictures of streets under water, people moving about in rowboats, and boys steering home-made rafts across the lawns. Given this geological situation, the rains on June 29, which continued until noon on the 30th—circus day—it was no wonder that the ground was extremely soft.

Robert Reinhart has done the major research on the various lots used by circuses in Monroe, and we indicate them on the accompanying map. None of them were large enough for the Ringling show, but the city owned (through tax foreclosure) the former race track property called Driving Park, and it was this that was offered to the circus for a rental of \$100.

The lot at Driving Park was for several years the only fenced park in Monroe, thus any event for which admission was charged was held there. It had been constructed in 1906 as a trotting course by one Charles Kibbie, and was part of what was known as the "Short Ship Circuit." This was a group of tracks, mostly in Michigan, that were fairly close together, thus obviating the need to ship horses long distances ("short ship"), which was thought to be harmful to their best performance. The races were held from June to November each year, and the opening meet was always convened at Monroe.

Physically a success, the Driving Park course was well-constructed and well-drained. The balance of the property, however, was not as well endowed. When the track closed, in 1914, the property was used for baseball and football games, and there are several reports of events being cancelled because of wet grounds.

Arriving late—they were due at five a.m.—the trains were unloaded at two locations, one on either side of the business district. Both were on First Street. The first section—cookhouse, menagerie, stock cars, etc., detrained on a sidetrack at the town lighting plant. The second section, canvas, sleepers, sideshow, etc., was unloaded further west at First and Front Streets. The third and fourth sections



were unloaded at the same locations. The empty cars were then routed onto the Pere Marquette system in preparation for the run to Flint. There were two routes to the lot, both having to use bridges to cross the Raisin River. They joined at Hollywood Street, which served as the entrance road to the Driving Park.

Today, Hollywood Street is paved and lined with homes built in the 1920's and 1930's, but in 1916 it was a dirt road. By June 30 of that year it had had the benefit of one day's rain and was in the process of absorbing a second.

On their approach to the lot the circus wagons cut into Hollywood Street, and on the lot itself they created great muddy ruts in the athletic fields. The combination of the late arrival and the swampy terrain put the day's activity further and further behind schedule. At noon it was announced that the parade would be cancelled. This could not have disappointed many people over the age of fifteen, as the steady rain of the morning was not conducive to standing at curbside. Certainly the show people were relieved.

The sideshow tent was erected and the bally begun. Nineteen-sixteen was the first year in which the Ringlings consolidated their outside shows in one large tent. Previously, they had carried three or four sideshows. Lou Graham was installed as manager.

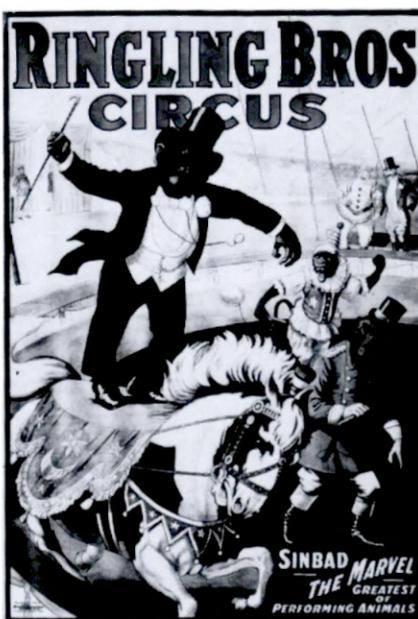
The matinee finally got underway at 4 p.m., two hours late. This was the season of the great pantomime production *Cinderella*, as we said, and it was the first item on the program. It was followed by the usual circus performance. While every act appeared, each was shortened, as a sort of "John Robinson" offering, because of the necessity to feed everyone before the night performance. The bad footing led to elimination of some of the more

Ringling Bros. used this twenty sheet poster in 1916. Pfening Archives.

dangerous equestrian feats. The matinee audience was sparse, producing \$1,900. in general admissions, half the normal gross.

During the day the circus served 2,879 meals (963, 948, 968). The Cook House Statement has a few interesting details. There were 385 performers (the "400" of advertising). The *Cinderella* scenery required the services of twelve men, specially detailed. Under "Boarding House," which was the designation for people who ate in the cook house, but were not employees, there were 94 persons. They were mainly privilege employees, and paid the show once a month for their meals.

Two sheet lithograph used by Ringling Bros. in 1916. Pfening Archives.



Local purchases included \$352 to a feed merchant, \$693 worth of groceries, and, of course, the cost of newspaper advertising. A "headhunter" shipped in a group of new working men he had gathered in Louisville, Kentucky. The railroad charged \$530 for their fares. The New York Central got \$650 for carrying the circus from Elyria, Ohio to Monroe.

The night performance opened on time at 8 p.m., and drew even a smaller crowd than did the matinee, despite the fact that the rain had ceased. The sales were only \$788. The bad weather and the uncertain starting times no doubt contributed to this. There was an axiom in the business that rain would decrease the attendance by one-third to one half because the farmers couldn't get to town over the unpaved roads. While this was a nineteenth-century convention, it may have still been true as late as 1916. The concerts added \$125 to the take, and the sideshow \$472. Another \$1,131. was realized from re-served seat sales. Adding in the food, balloon and program income gave the company a total income for the day of \$5,491. The "nut" was \$8,000.

It wasn't the worst day of the season. Nine other dates contributed less, the least being Galesburg, Illinois at only \$1,854.

The night loading was also on First Street, but further west, at the Pere Marquette tracks (see map). The first section was away at 10:45 and the fourth, the Pullmans, sometime after midnight.

When asked how the business done in Monroe compared with that generally seen, one of the showmen told a *News-Courier* reporter that it was not up to standard; he could not speak of the probability of a return date. Another attache, not so reticent, told a local man that they'd never show Monroe again. This proved to not be completely true, as Ringling-Barnum played the town in 1932.

The hard use of the Driving Park lot put an end to it as far as an athletic field was concerned, or as a circus lot, for that matter. It was sold for building lots a few years later.

Such days occur over and over in circus history. "Who booked this town?", is an oft-repeated question. Even the mighty Ringling aggregation was not proof against the combination of bad weather, a soft lot, and a small town.

We are indebted to Robert Reinhart, former Monroe resident, and the files of the Circus World Museum, the Milner Library at Illinois State University, the Monroe County Library, and the Monroe Historical Society for assistance in the research for this article. Our map was a 1938 publication of the Automobile Club of Michigan.



HOLIDAY  
GREETINGS  
TO OUR  
FRIENDS  
OLD  
AND NEW.  
WE WISH YOU  
THE  
SEASON'S  
BEST.



If you would like one of our 1995 Circus Calendars, send \$2.00 to cover postage/handling to:  
GRAPHICS 2000 • 6290 Harrison Drive, Suite 16 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89120

SEASONS GREETINGS

AND GREAT HOPES FOR 1995 TO

Lee, Judy, Alexander, Sebastian, Max,  
Sheba and Shadow Stevens

With Special Greetings for "The Girls."

From UNCLE HERB

**A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance**  
*The Evolution of Trapeze*

*Just how important is it to be the first to do a thing? How important is it to do the most, to go the highest, the farthest? How important? Some people have died for it."*

Did you ever wonder who first swung from a trapeze? Did you ever wonder when the first aerial somersault was thrown? Did you ever wonder how the complex team aerial performances were developed and who invented them? If you have, you are not alone.

In 1985, circus historian Steve Gossard discovered a conflict. Two different cities in the United States had taken credit for the invention of the particular type of trapeze performance called the *flying return act*. Since then Gossard has been fixated on finding the source of the invention of the flying return act and solving the mystery. He has spent thousands of hours scrolling through 19th century periodicals in tracing the evolution of the various types of trapeze performances.

What he uncovered is more than a historical study. It is an adventure. It is a mystery. It is the story of **A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance**. Share the author's sense of discovery as he traces the evolution of this daring and beautiful art form, and chronicles the exploits of dozens of long-forgotten foolhardy aerial daredevils.

Send check or money order for \$25 (post paid) to:  
Steve Gossard, 10 Siesta Ct., Bloomington, IL 61704



# Holiday Greetings

To all our Circus and Carny Friends



Al and Shirley Stencell

Royal Bros.--Martin & Downs--Super Circus International--  
Century All Star Circus

# Circus Life and Adventure of **ADAM BARDY**

A Connecticut magazine recently wrote this about Adam Bardy's book:

"If you're still a kid at heart when the circus comes to town, you'll love Adam Bardy's life story of his adventures of circus life. Adam Bardy was born in Webster on May 21, 1907. Back in 1907 thousands of immigrants from Europe kept coming to America.

"Bardy's life might be compared somewhat to Mark Twain's boyhood heroes Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and back in 1907 in June, Mark Twain met George Bernard Shaw in London. It was a rainy Saturday when the Buffalo Bill Circus came to Webster. Adam Bardy was only 8 years old when he crawled into a circus wagon that night. However on Sunday morning when he crawled out of his hiding place, he wanted to get back home. Bardy had to have a guardian angel as he got back home before he was missed.

"In 1924 Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus played in Worcester. Bardy's interest in the circus was renewed and he got a job with the side show. The circus liked getting young men to join them because it was out of young people that real circus troupers were made.

"Bardy found that circus life in the roaring twenties was rough and tough. On sunny days it was wonderful, but on rainy days you went to bed in the circus cars with wet clothes, and you would have to wait for a sunny day to dry out. If you could put in a full circus season under these conditions, you would be called a real trouper. In the twenties Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey was a railroad circus. It traveled in four

sections. The first section was the cookhouse crew along with some circus wagons that carried the cookhouse. The second section carried most of the circus wagons and the stock cars full of work horses and nearly all the working crew. The third section carried the wild animal cages. There were 43 elephants with the circus.

"One of our heroes was Tom Mix and on Saturday afternoon when the local movie theater featured westerns. Tom Mix and his wonder horse Tony was a favorite of young and old movie fans. We recall that Tom Mix was with the Sells Floto Circus and we were invited to attend the circus and see Mix in person in Willimantic. Adam Bardy was working with the Sells-Floto Circus at the time and knew Mix very well. There were more circuses in business in the twenties than there are now. Hagenback and Wallace, John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, Sparks and Walter L. Main were some of the big ones.

"Few folks realized that Tom Mix was at one time a real sheriff, a Deputy U.S. Marshall, a Texas Ranger, a real cow puncher and ranch foreman. He was even Roughrider under Teddy Roosevelt. For Bardy to personally know and work with Mix was one of the truly great thrills of his wonderful life. Mix was one of the truly greats of the silent movies.

"Adam Bardy at the age of 86 can look back at his many adventurous experiences in the circus, life with Gypsies, fortune telling, bootlegging, marriages, and finding love and happiness.

"He has written a book The Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy. This book would have made a wonderful movie with enough wholesome family desires of an eight year old "running away" for a day; joining the circus and becoming a boss canvasman and having his crew set up the big circus tent while still a teenager. Fortune telling, boxing, bootlegging, and after four score years becoming a successful author. With the right promotional agency, the life and adventures of Adam Bardy could be made into a television series that might parallel the Untouchables and Little House on the Prairie. Many men desire the anonymity of Mister X but Adam Bardy is a real Mr. X . . . Ex-Circus Man, Ex-Pugilist, Ex-Still Operator, Ex-Bootlegger, Ex-Fortune Teller, and an excellent author."

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy, send check or money order for \$12.95 to:

**ADAM BARDY**  
87 Alm Rd.  
Thompson, CT 06277



## *Presenting the One and Only* *P. T. Barnum*

*Barnumiana: A Select, Annotated Bibliography of Works By or Relating to P. T. Barnum, Including Dramatic Representations, Music, Original Art Works, Major Collections of Barnumiana, & A Barnum Chronology.* Compiled by A. H. Saxon. Fairfield, Conn.: Jumbo's Press, 1995. Approximately 175 pages, plastic "comb" binding.

Based on the compiler's research into the life of America's most celebrated showman over the past quarter century, this major new reference work, of unprecedented scope and depth, attempts to include every book and article of significance on the subject published through 1994, together with important manuscript sources and a considerable number of ephemeral and non-print items that will richly repay the attention of students and the most dedicated scholars.

The compiler—the editor of *Selected Letters of P. T. Barnum* (1983) and author of the award-winning *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (1989)—offers his candid evaluations of many of the entries and, in the descriptions or short essays that sometimes accompany them, presents new and often startling information on such topics as the Fejee Mermaid and Little Woolly Horse, recent attempts to drag Barnum's name into the abortion-contraception debate, and the showman's alleged connection with an Australian aborigine whose mummified body was discovered as late as 1993 in the basement of a Cleveland funeral home. In the tradition of the great circus bibliography created by the late Raymond Toole-Stott, *Barnumiana* is intended not only to be consulted as a standard reference source, but also to be read with pleasure and perhaps even amusement.

The contents and organization of the bibliography follow a unique arrangement and include, in addition to those mentioned in the title, sections and sub-sections on The American Museum, Tom Thumb & Company, Jenny Lind, Circus & Hippodrome, Jumbo, Satires & Parodies, Juvenilia, Interviews, and Manuscripts, as well as General works both by Barnum (with a separate sub-section on his famous Autobiography) and others. Poetry and fiction of more than passing interest are also noticed, and on occasion an item that would otherwise hardly merit the attention of an intelligent reader is included simply because it is so bad or preposterous.

For readers of *Bandwagon* only, copies of *Barnumiana* ordered and paid for by 15 February 1995 are available at the special pre-publication price of \$27 (U.S.), plus \$3 for shipping (\$4 abroad, surface rate). Connecticut customers please add \$1.62 for sales tax or send copy of tax exemption certificate (one time only). Thereafter, the price will be \$30, plus \$3 for shipping (\$4 abroad). Connecticut customers add \$1.80 sales tax or send certificate. *Barnumiana* will be ready for mailing by the end of March.

Send orders and remit to:

Jumbo's Press  
166 Orchard Hill Drive  
Fairfield, CT 06430

**J**ohn Robinson's Great World's Exposition 10 Big Shows 10 Combined paid a brief visit to Kansas in 1894, played five towns and left the state. Times were hard in Kansas and audiences frequently minuscule. John Robinson had not survived for nearly 70 years by exhibiting in hardship areas.

Newspaper advertising for the big show began with the July 13, Chetopa *Advance* heralding the exhibitions there on July 24. None of the ads named any performers.

At Chetopa Robinson announced:

"COMING! To CHETOPA

Thursday, JULY 24

In Majestic Splendor,

"Unrivaled and Without a Peer in the Realm of Amusements,

JOHN ROBINSONS

Great World's Exposition.

10 BIG SHOWS 10 Combined."

Several lengthy handouts were used in Kansas all of which stated and re-stated that Robinson's show was a "strictly moral circus" featuring the magnificent Biblical story of "Solomon, His Temple and the Queen of Sheba." A handout in the *Advance* provided the details.

"THE JOHN ROBINSON SHOWS.

Sixty-nine Years Under

One Continuous Management.

"Some poet has said or sung, "the days may come, the days may go, the world moves on forever." Like the world the John Robinson show for sixty-nine years has been steadily moving on its never-ceasing march. Numberless shows have come and gone since it has had its beginning, yet in all these years it has never lost a single season, never missed its appointments, and never failed to gratify to the fullest extent the expectation of the public. Each year growing apace, each year bountifully adding to its multifarious attractions, it comes as a vision of enchantment, and reviewing the memory

**ONLY BIG SHOW COMING**

**Meritorious Magnitude**

**and Magnificence**

Vol. IV, Chapter Four, Part One, 1894

By Orin Copple King

Copyright © 1993 Orin Copple King

of past enjoyments, it presents fresh surprises, fresh delights and fresh attractions. So will it be with the season that is with us. For the current year the management have associated an unprecedented auxiliary to their already vast schedule of enjoyable features, and one which cannot fail to invite patronage, only limited by the capacity of the canvas.

"We allude to the production, on a scale of opulent splendor never preceded, of the new Biblical Spectacle, Solomon, His Temple and the Queen of Sheba--a spectacle prolific in grand scenic effect, impressive in pomp and pageantry, realistic in its reproductions of patriarchal era, sacred in its biblical associations, and enchanting in its ballets, poses, marches and groupings. The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon's Court, with her immense and richly costumed retinue, the judgment of Solomon, the Sacrifices in the Temple, Solomon's Seven Hundred

Two of the Robinson cottage cages design by lithograph artist Emil Roringarder and built in 1891. Albert Conover collection.

Wives, the Grand Procession to meet Sheba's young and lovely Queen, the Wells and City of Jerusalem, the Inner Court of Solomon's Temple, Moriah and the City of David, the Great Throne of Ivory, the Sacred Ark of the Covenant, the bewitching Ballet of lovely Cresset Girls and myriad features that can not be given in detail, are the attractions this wondrous Spectacle presents. With a feature so desirable added to its admirable Four-ring Circus, the vast menagerie of rare and seldom-seen wild animals, and the great Royal Roman Hippodrome, the many canvases, spacious though they be, should and will be packed from center to its circumference by eager and gratified spectators during the sojourn of the John Robinson Show.

"The show will exhibit in Chetopa July 24th."

An ad in the Chetopa *Democrat* had a cut depicting three generations--Grandfather, Son and Grandson.

After the exhibitions the *Democrat* noted, "There was not as big a crowd in town on show day as was expected."

Robinson played Coffeyville on July 25. The Coffeyville *Daily Journal* the day before the exhibitions offered comments, predictions and warnings: "Hot, Hotter, Hottest.

"A large crowd is expected to attend the show Wednesday.

"Look out for the shell game and other fakes in connection with the show tomorrow.

"A merry-go-round has located itself just south of Nye's marble shop on Union Street.

"A number of Indians came in this morning and will remain until after the show on Wednesday."

The *Journal* was an evening paper and reported the events of show day right up to press time:

"Big show.

"Big crowd.

"Much dust.

"The small boy is happy.

"Did you see the elephant?

"Which one was it under?

"John Robinson's show carries 870 people.

"Several special policemen were appointed to assist in keeping order Wednesday.

"Our 'Brother in Red' is in the city in great numbers. A show always has attractions for him.

"We are requested to say that the fakirs and gamblers in town are in no manner connected with the SHOW.

"Some unscrupulous person started the



report that Robinson's Show was burned at Chetopa Tuesday, but it arrived there all right nevertheless.

"Fakirs and 'juice' vendors raked in the shekels today.

"Ed. Bender came up from Nowata and took in the show Wednesday.

"Bert Adams came down from Chanute Wednesday and took in the show.

"Our good old comrade G. W. Culp, of Fawn, came in to see the crowd on show day, and embraced the opportunity to renew his subscription for THE JOURNAL."

After the show had come and gone, the *Journal* reported, "Old John Robinson's show has been here. It came, it conquered and it went. Wednesday was the date of its advent in Coffeyville. It was an ideal circus day. It was bright and clear, and the sun's rays poured down hot from sunrise to sunset. A large number of country people were in town in the morning and quite a number from surrounding towns came in on the early trains. The parade was a good one, the largest ever seen there. The music, which was made by two bands and a drum corps was excellent, the musicians being well instructed and far above the average of circus bands. A feature of the parade was the number of open cages it contained. Some of the best features of the menagerie, were exhibited through the streets. The fine appearance of the horses and the superior quality of the wardrobes used in the parade were the subject of general comment. The arrangement of the parade was such as to make it interesting throughout, and in planning it the mistake so often made of grouping the really attractive features at the head so as to make the rest of the exhibition monotonous was carefully avoided. From the big band car in front to the man with the fog horn voice that brought up the rear the display was interesting and attractive.

The two performances in the rings were the highest degree of excellence. They were so simultaneously given in the two rings and stage between that one became bewildered in trying to keep track of them. Not only was the ground area filled with handsome well-trained horses, skilled riders, jugglers, acrobats, ridiculous clowns and other performers, but the space overhead was filled with wire-walkers, trapeze, horizontal bar and perch performers. Everything was manipulated with a precision that was marvelous. Every man seemed to be in the right place at the right time.

The acts in every part of the tent were completed at the same moment, and then like a flash down came the apparatus and up went the ropes, nets, wires and other

**COMING!**  
**TO**  
**CHETOPA,**  
**Tuesday, July 24th,**  
**IN MAJESTIC SPLENDOR,**  
Unrivaled and without a peer in the realms of amusements,  
**JOHN ROBINSON'S**  
**GREAT WORLD'S EXPOSITION.**  
**10 BIG SHOWS 10**  
**COMBINED.**



*The Largest and Oldest Amusement organization in Existence.*

## 70 YEARS OF SUCCESS.

Now without a peer in the Circus World. Unrivaled and unequalled in the Nation's History. Its tremendous magnitude, colossal extent and mammoth proportions surpassing all rivals. In conjunction with the acknowledged masterpiece of scenic magnificence, THE GRAND BIBLICAL SPECTACLE.

This ad appeared in the Chetopa Democrat on July 14, 1894. Kansas State Historical Society.

trappings for the next act. The horses knew as well as the men when their work was done, and away they dashed with flying heels while their successors were led into the rings. It was a wonderful exhibition of system and discipline admirably portrayed. One of the most interesting displays and certainly one of the most uncommon was that of Solomon and his court, and the Queen of Sheba and her attendants. This novel feature of the show attracted universal attention

and pleased everybody. It was the most interesting and grandest spectacle ever witnessed in Coffeyville. The audience was delighted with this new and novel feature of the performance. Altogether, it was a good show, but, like all of its predecessors, it took "away more than it left."

In other columns the *Journal* commented, "Col. Lowlow, the gentlemanly General Manager of John Robinson's show treated THE JOURNAL force with all the courtesy and attention he could command. Every department of the great exhibition was thrown open for their inspection and entertainment. Our children were made the especial objects of his care, and his lecture in the menagerie was very instructive to them.

"Quite an array of fire arms was displayed in police court Thursday morning. They had been taken from would-be tough men the day previous"

"A cheap jewelry fakir was arrested and fined Wednesday.

"Five plain drunks plead guilty and were fined one dollar and costs each before Judge Carrington Wednesday night.

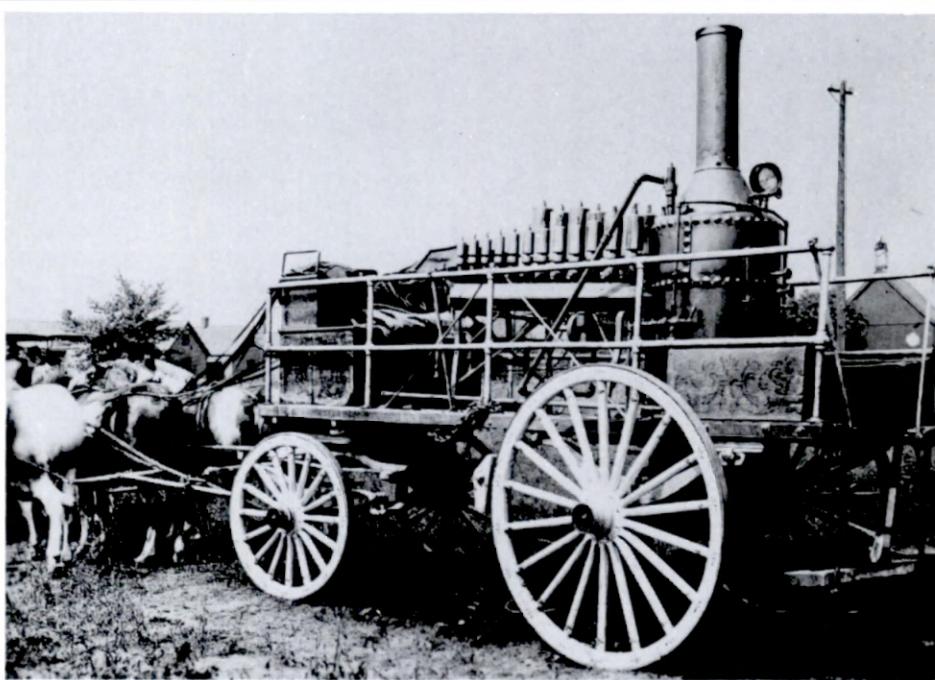
"City Marshal Mac Loving and ex-night policeman, John Wilson, indulged in a rough and tumble scrap at the show grounds Wednesday night. Wilson was the aggressor and received some pretty severe punches about the head and face from a billy in the hands of the Marshal Mac had a few scratches to show next morning for his share in the melee. As the fight occurred outside of the corporation, both principals were brought before Justice Harbour Thursday morning and fined five dollars and costs for their fun. Wilson claims that he was getting the best of it, when some parties interfered and held him while Loving was allowed to beat him with his gun and billy. It is time such disgraceful conduct on the part of city officers was stopped. It gives the town an unsavory reputation. Quit it."

The only report concerning the performances at Neodesha on July 26, was the Neodesha *Register's* comment that, "Robinson's circus drew a big crowd yesterday."

J. M. J. Kane, Robinson's advertising agent called on the Columbus *Advocate* on July 10, and placed advertising with the editor, which may have induced the remark that, "We found him a pleasant gentleman to transact business with." Show day was July 27.

The circus erected three large billboards on three corners of the town square. They were nearly 500 feet in length.

Four "colored" bootleggers were arrested show day. One posted a \$50 bond but the other three could not pay the fine



Steam calliope used by John Robinson in 1894. Pfening Archives.

and costs and were put to work on the city streets.

"Jas. (sic) Robinson's 10 (?) Circuses Combined," according to the *Advocate*, "exhibited there last Friday afternoon and evening to large crowds. The usual price of 50¢ was charged which was too much. It was a fair 25¢ show. Of course the usual number of thieves and fakirs accompanied it."

The last stand of the Kansas route was Pittsburg on July 29. The newspapers ran advertisements and handouts, but when the exhibitions were over the only published report was in the Pittsburg *Weekly Headlight*: 'The last one of the tough gang who had been following after Robinson's show for the past month was arrested there Saturday night, but upon his promise to leave and not be around the show any more, Mr. Robinson agreed to let him go free. Mr. Robinson said they had been troubled a great deal by a gang of toughs and pick pockets following in the wake of the show, but he had got rid of them by a systematic course of weeding them out and when here he was of the opinion that he had got rid of them for good.'

John Robinson's Great World's Exposition, in 1894, played these Kansas towns: July 24, Chetopa; July 25, Coffeyville; July 26, Neodesha; July 27, Columbus; July 28, Pittsburg.

\*\*\*\*\*

"The Only Adam Forepaugh" was the way Adam Forepaugh, Jr., described himself in the newspapers of 1894. After years of being tightly controlled by his highly successful father, Adam Jr. at last had an opportunity to operate a circus his way. His way was to rob, plunder, lie, cheat, and steal at the expense of his patrons.

sas appeared on the same page of the *Hiawatha Journal* promoting the exhibitions there on July 31: "Blood Will Tell."

"Adam II son of Adam I, is out with a first-class three-ring circus, menagerie and a big hippodrome after the Roman fashion but with all the modern improvements including all the sports of the race track. Adam Forepaugh, the younger, gained a valuable experience during the life time of the sturdy old showman and it is in the Forepaugh blood to manage a circus and run a hippo-arenic entertainment. The acquirement of a great fortune has not been a temptation to the old Roman's only son to live in idleness; ease has no sweets for one bread to a life so busy and exciting as circusing and that is why Adam Forepaugh, who worthily wears an honored and far famed name, will be with us on Tuesday July 31st."

The second handout titled the "Old Reliable Adam Forepaugh Show," is laughable considering the ruthlessness of the show's grifters toward the public.

"Many of our readers will recall the name of the well-known establishment that exhibits in our city July 31 with pleasure. With many of them it brings vividly to mind the first elephant they ever saw. There is a whole sermon in the career of this show. It proves that when any concern becomes known as an honestly conducted one fulfills its promise to the public that it succeeds and the business flourishes and becomes a fixture to be handed down from generation to generation. It proves also the truth of the old proverb that 'Honesty is the best policy.' The career of Adam Forepaugh's show up to the present time has been one of continued success, and the proprietor, Adam Forepaugh, deserves it. He has always given the public the worth of their money. In these days of humbug, it is nearly refreshing to be able to speak in terms of praise of an amusement enterprise."

"This year the management promises its a new surprise in the shape of the smallest elephant on earth, '36 inches in height.' This indeed will be a great curiosity. The whole show is said to be exceptionally good, and we will miss our guess if the tents on the day of exhibition are not crowded. As this will be the only show to visit this section this year, we advise all our readers to be sure and see it."

After the show had come and gone, the *Journal* reported that, "Justice Hubbert set up court down on the circus grounds Tuesday and fined three fakirs \$2 and costs before they could wink either eye. He then let them go and they won several dollars off as old a man as Judge Hubbert!"

"The adage that an 'old fool is the worst fool' was proven circus day. Solomon said, 'a fool and his money soon parteth.'"

"Later a white man backed up uncomfortably close to the bear cage and the same animal 'swiped' him in the spine. This man ran as if old Nick were at his heels. From that time on Bruin had plenty of fresh ozone. Nobody stood in his way."

Two handouts used extensively in Kan-

Col. W. D. Sapher, press agent, was the "gentleman the newspaper boys were looking for," and he paid the *Journal* a half-hour visit. Sapher's popularity with the press was influenced by his payment of the advertising bill.

The Frankfort *Weekly Review* related that, "Forepaugh's advance agent contracted with our hotel and restaurant proprietors for meals for three hundred people." Frankfort saw the show on August 1.

Following the exhibitions the *Review* made several comments on the events of the day: "Wednesday's crowd was simply immense."

"Our restaurants did a big business on Wednesday.

"The circus was about the best we have ever had here. It was well patronized, too.

"Did you lose anything on the shell game?" is a common interrogation.

"Mr. Forepaugh has a good show, quite a lot of animals, but there are more 'sharers' with him than was necessary. In fact, on every hand could be found some scheme to rob the unwary of his ducats.

"W. H. DeWalt of Vermillion was one of the many who suffered 'financial losses' show day. One of the many sharers who were with the Hon. Adam Forepaugh's circus got hold of some of his money and refused to give it back.

"There were more 'sharers' with Forepaugh's show than have ever been known to visit our city at one time before. There were all manner of gambling devices, and worst of all was the town was overrun with pickpockets.

"Major Beaty, of Vleits, came up to the show Wednesday, and while in a crowd he took out his pocketbook to get some money to use when some scoundrel who was nearby grabbed for twenty-five dollars in bills which the Major had with him—and the scoundrel not only grabbed but got just what he was after. And the worst feature of the whole transaction was that the Major is still minus the money.

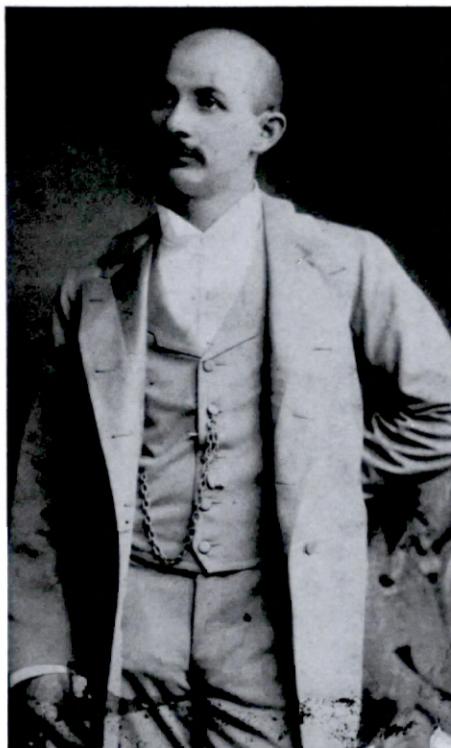
"Mr. Forepaugh called on us a few moments Wednesday afternoon, after the first circus performance, and the gentleman informed us that he had never visited a town the size of ours that could turn out any larger crowd of people. Well, the gentleman knew just what he was talking about, and he spoke the truth.

"The ladies of the Christian church took in seventy-five dollars from the dinner and supper given in the Hampton building show day. They cleared fifty-five dollars over expenses. They deserved their success for they gave an excellent dinner and supper."

The Washington *Republic*, speaking of the exhibitions of August 2 said, "It seems

to be the pretty general opinion that the so-called Adam Forepaugh show which visited this city last week, was the worst fake and had with it the worst lot of swindlers, gamblers and pick pockets that ever visited this city.

"Another Adam Forepaugh show was in Bath, Maine, on the same day one was here, as will be seen by the following item clipped by Capt. Tobey from the Thomasston, Maine, *Herald*: 'If you have any business in Bath, Aug. 2nd you can get half fare on the M. C. R. R. as Adam Forepaugh show is there that day.'



Adam Forepaugh, Jr. Pfening Archives.

"It is stated that there are still two other Forepaugh shows doing the country this year, making in all four shows for Forepaugh."

Circus day was frequently a painful time for editors as the following remark in the Beloit *Courier* illustrates: "Say, we're going to have a circus [August 3]. Everybody, as usual, will go to it, including the man who can't afford to pay for the county paper to read."

On a different page the editor continued to gnash his teeth.

"The hard times talk so much indulged was put to shame on circus day. It is estimated that no less than eight thousand persons went to the Forepaugh's circus at an average of 37 1/2 cents each, which would foot up an even \$3,000 besides the side-show and royal after circus concert expenditures, making approximately

\$4,000 in cash paid out that way, to say nothing about the chaps who yielded up lots of stuff in trying to break the other fellow. But there is little doubt that much of the money spent belonged to some other person—we know of at least \$2 of our money going that way—the fellow owing us that much on subscription and only a few days before that telling us that he 'didn't know how he was going to get through the winter on account of hard times.' The *Courier* reviewed the show providing opinions on the performance and the gambling: "Adam Forepaugh's circus exhibited in Beloit last Friday. We were much pleased to meet in the person of the press representative, Col. W. D. Saphar, who showed us marked attention, and was genial as ever. Beloit readers will remember Col. Saphar as the gentleman who, ten years ago, in the old opera house in our city, managed and put on the play by home talent, of the 'Dutch Volunteer,' himself taking the character of Deedrick, and which play netted a handsome purse for Beloit Post.

"As to the circus, the street parade was fine and the performance under tent was up to standard. We were most interested in and pleased with the bicycling, the boom-de-ay dancing of a noble horse, the high tight-wire walking and maneuvering of petite Miss Livingstone. The latter was marvelously executed the wire being stretched about fifteen feet above ground, and she never made a balk, but was as graceful and self-possessed as if on earth.

"One of the freaks belonging to the side show was a human shape that was roosting on a box beside the snake-charmer, who, after the afternoon performance, announced that a snake as large around as an ordinary man's body, over 32 feet long, weighing over three hundred pounds would be exhibited in the side show for 'the small sum of 10 cents,' and offered everybody a dollar who would prove that he was a liar. Of course there were a lot of 'fish' in the audience who bit at the 'snake' and although no one had the courage to claim the dollar we venture to say that everyone in that tent made the forlorn and threadbare resolve to 'never blow in another cent on a circus.'

"Charles G. Jefferson, the strongest man in the world, exhibited his strength by lifting and playing with a block of iron weighing 87 pounds, using only his thumb and two fingers; gripping an anvil by the extreme point raising it from the ground and turning it completely around; then he handled with ease a two-hundred pound dumb-bell.

"He is the man who lifted 1,571 1/4 pounds, dead weight, without harness.

"But of all the fakir gambling outfits

that ever came to town this circus took the lead. We have no pity, though, for the very very foolish men who lost lots of money in trying to beat these professionals at their own game. In nearly every instance that it got out the mulcted ones were men whom you would least suspect would tamper with such skin games, and with few exceptions the ones who lost most were the fellows we all know here as high up muck-a-mucks in the order of country savers—the chaps who, with their mouths, on a street corner or dry goods box, can, in just five minutes regulate the finances of the government, mostly you know, by dividing up with the plutocrats; those fellows, you know, who curse the Wall street gamblers the loudest, and know all about how the plutocrats rob the country. Yes, these are the very chaps who undertook to down a very commonplace, everyday circus gambler. The result is that they, or their wives and children will go barefooted this winter, while the chaps they were so easily going to rob will wear patent-leather boots and Arctic overshoes. No, we have no pity for these avaricious country savers who get caught so easily, but we are sorry that their families must suffer the penalty of their idiotic bucking the 'tiger'."

The *Courier's* opinion of the Forepaugh show's sharp practices was confirmed by the Beloit *Gazette*: "A vile outfit, alleging itself to be Adam Forepaugh's show was in the city last Friday. It was a collection of gamblers, thieves and toughs, and carried away hundreds of dollars of stolen money... The show was a fraud with hardly a redeeming feature."

The Belleville *Democrat* had a different view of the show than did the rest of the Kansas papers: "The Forepaugh circus last Thursday [August 9] was the most quiet and peaceful circus that ever visited Belleville. There was very little of that profanity and vulgarity that generally characterizes circuses. But it was also the poorest attended. There were only about 300 in the afternoon and not much over 100 in the evening."

The summer of 1894 was a time of severe depression in Kansas. For the first time in the history of the state wheat was selling lower than corn—wheat 35 cents a bushel, corn 45. The coming corn harvest was considered a failure because of the drouth. Many newspapers did not publish during 1894.

The Sabetha *Republican-Herald* made no comment on the exhibitions of August 13, but did report a scene that was seldom recorded: "Many of the residents of the south end enjoyed quite a free show, Monday evening, watching the circus em-

THE ONLY BIG SHOW  
To Visit This Section This Season.  
THE ONLY **ADAM FOREPAUGH**  
**Menagerie, Circus,**  
**Hippodrome, Wild West**  
**And Trained Animal Show.**



**At Sabetha, Monday, Aug. 13**  
AFTERNOON AND NIGHT.

Many New Foreign Features

Never Before Seen in America.

**T**HE BEST SHOW ON EARTH, bar none. The only show in the world that has a horse that walks the tight rope. The only show on earth that has a baby elephant thirty-six inches high. The only show in America that has a talking horse.

This ad appeared in the Sabetha *Republican-Herald* on August 3, 1895. Kansas State Historical Society.

ployees load up the wagons and other effects of a big circus. As soon as the circus performances began the cages of animals were hauled over and speedily mounted on the flat cars. The more bulky looking elephants and camels caused still less trouble for when the gangway which constituted the door of their big car was let down, each elephant as his name was called speedily climbed up into the car and was fastened in its place. The camels were far more troublesome and intractable. The first train left at midnight and the second half an hour later. They had 23 cars of their own to load."

In handouts the show claimed a train of 40 cars but it is noteworthy that a reporter could find only 23.

Another handout used frequently was "Rome Next Door."

It appeared in the Holton *Recorder* prior to the exhibitions of August 15: "Adam Forepaugh the only son of the famous

showman the late Adam Forepaugh, is at one and the same time bringing Rome to our midst and carrying us back several centuries. We can not have the Coliseum, as Chicago has a corner on all old buildings subject to purchase and removal, but the enterprising Mr. Forepaugh will provide an enormous hippodrome tent big enough to hold the whole county to witness such races as Ceaser never saw. The Roman emperors had their chariot drivers and standing racers but Forepaugh as all of that and more, he has English and Kentucky thoroughbreds that fairly fly through space and 'tear the turf up' as they are guided to the winning post by male and female jockeys. Thus we have Rome and the Coliseum under the enormous pavilion and the entire circus royal thrown in 'without extra charge' as our friend of the side show has it. Forepaugh Day is appointed for Holton on August 15th, and there will be joy to many a youngster, and oldster, too, for that matter when Adam Forepaugh's show comes to town with sounding brass of the marital bands and the gay outing of the artists in their parade on the morning of the exhibition.

"Reports from towns where Forepaugh's circus has exhibited all agree," according to the *Recorder*, "that there is a bad lot of men accompanying the show that have no compunction about fleecing the unwary countryman and relieving the unsophisticated granger of his surplus cash."

As for circus day, the only comment of the *Recorder* was, "The crowd yesterday was not up to the usual circus day mark, in spite of the variety of attractions."

Adam Forepaugh, Jr. was an equal opportunity ruffian who did not deny his own people the same rough treatment he gave the public. After the evening performance at Alma on August 16 the show disciplined one of its own.

"After the circus last Thursday George R. Coupe," according to the *Alma Enterprise* "demanded his pay amounting he said to nearly \$700. This was at first refused him and instead of his pay he got a severe pounding. He quit work and went after his clothes to the car when he was again attacked and so badly beaten as to be hardly recognizable receiving injuries from which he may never recover. He got the sheriff and went after his pay again this time receiving \$150 in cash and two notes for \$225 each. He afterwards made complaint against two of the circus men C. C. Warrell and Mr. Stoddard for assault and battery and Saturday Sheriff Palenske and D. M. Gardner went to Osage City after the men but failed to find them

they having been notified of the intended arrest."

Sheriff Palenske sent warrants to six Kansas Counties in a further attempt to arrest Warrell and Stoddard.

Coupe was not a man to give up and he continued to pursue his attackers and filed an attachment against the show. The *Enterprise* published the following account on September 14: "Last Friday at Gibson City, Illinois United States Marshal Brinton seized Adam Forepaugh's circus on a writ of attachment issued by Judge Allen of the United States Circuit court by Geo. Coupe, late chief musician, who filed a suit for \$10,000 damages in the U. S. court at Springfield, for personal injuries received at the hands of the proprietors of the show, whom he alleges brutally assaulted him and set a hound on him at Alma, Kansas, and disabled him for life. We trust that he will get damages asked for and send the brutes who beat him up so here, to the pen. It was one of the most brutal pieces of business we ever heard of."

The proprietors were unable to give bond to appear in U. S. circuit court in the damage suit against them, and refused to satisfy Coupe's claim, and Saturday Deputy Marshal Burroughs arrived at Springfield with twenty animals, including three elephants, two camels, a lion, bear, panthers, etc., worth about \$10,000, all the property owned by Lyle Stoddard, Coupe's chief assailant, and their keepers. Marshal Brinton will advertise for ten days in the papers, and if a bond is not forthcoming in that time he will sell the animals and cages at auction. Deputy Burroughs had a narrow escape in loading the outfit at Gibson City. He arrived on the Wabash train early Friday morning as Forepaugh's show was pulling out on the Lake Erie and Western Railroad to jump the engagement at Gibson City and flee to Indiana, but Burroughs had the train held at a crossing while he served the writ."

The Alma *Signal* also reported the seizure and added some details of the attack: "Coupe was Forepaugh's musical director who was brutally assaulted in Alma on the day of the show here. Being so indiscreet as to ask for pay due one of his men he was set upon by a big dog, knocked down, his teeth knocked out and his face mashed in the boot heel of a professional slugger attached to the show. Coupe seemed every inch a gentleman and the many friends made while here hope he will get the full amount of his claim against the show."

As for the exhibitions at Alma, the *Enterprise* reported that, "The circus last Thursday was well attended. Crop failures and hard times do not stop people from going to circuses. Many were present from Wabaunsee, Alta Vista, Esk-

ridge, Paxico and Maple Hill. The parade was good, the performance was fair, the dust was fearful and the shell games and robbers were numerous and bold. It was the hardest outfit that has struck the town for many a year."

Forepaugh arrived in Osawatomie coming from Osage City on the Missouri Pacific. Following the exhibitions of August 20, the *Osawatomie Graphic* stated, "The circus was not up to the standard by several degrees, yet it brought thousands of country people to town, and many who had never been seen here before. In this respect the circus was a benefit to the town in a business way. A larger amount of the money taken away was from the country but a good deal was left with business men here. In a talk with the manager he said they had the best crowd there they had had for fourteen days, and further that this place would undoubtedly have the preference of Paola with the circus people in the future. Osawatomie will be pleased with this arrangement, just so we never get Forepaugh's show again, or at least this one, for they are the worst gang of fakirs that ever traveled as a circus. The show itself was not so bad, although we have seen better, but every man connected with it seemed to be after your pocketbook, and as said before, succeeded admirably in many instances. The best of police regulations prevailed, however, and there was no case of house breaking or disturbances of the peace."

The Garnett *Journal* remarked snidely: "The circus was well attended Tuesday [August 21]. It did not amount to very much. Some of the suckers who can always beat another man's game are wiser as well as poorer. Circus fakirs always travel for their health!"

Circus day at Pleasanton on August 22 was far from satisfactory. On the 24th the *Herald* ran a vicious story about a vicious aggregation of circus people which the paper said "consisted of cut-throats, blacklegs, gamblers, thieves, fakirs, confidence men, shell men, and all kinds of men but decent men."

The parade was described as, "simply an aggregation of ordinary vans, three bands, a bear, four elephants, one yak, a deer, one zebra, a tapir, and three common pigs, one lion, a kangaroo, two camels, a llama and perhaps one or two other animals. The drivers and attendants were dark and swarthy dirty Dagos unwashed and smelled bad."

"After the procession passed down Main Street a fellow came along and shouted 'There will be no night performance only one show at 2 p.m. Everyone said he lied, that it was a trick to catch suckers. A small crowd of people attended the afternoon performance and a less number in the evening."

"It is safe to say that Forepaugh's men are the greatest aggregation of gamblers, toughs, liars, swindlers, and rowdies that ever infected this city. Everyone of them should have been arrested, heavily fined, and imprisoned."

"At night when the concert began it was broken up by 'a free-for-all' fight on the outside of the tent the people asked for their money but did not get it. They were insulted and jeered and told that

they were not doing business that way. A drunken showman ordered a young farmer to leave the grounds and with the command struck him with his fist.

The plucky young man represented the insult by knocking down two or three of the toughs, then the parties drew their guns and began shooting indiscriminately. About 100 shots were fired and several balls passed through the tent which frightened the audience. A bullet went through the sleeve of a young lady's dress which was too close for her comfort and welfare. A colored policeman was swiped on the face with a board and it is claimed that

he in return shot a big colored duffer in the pit of the stomach and killed him. John Thomas and Joe Davis, both colored, were shot, the former with bird shot which lodged in the back of his head and hip, the latter received his medicine in the side; both had slight wounds. When the outfit was on board the train it is said that the Pleasanton boys gave them a parting salute to remind them that they could not with impunity 'run over' the boys of the border."

The Pleasanton *Observer* which agreed with the *Herald*, stated that, "They had numerous games by which they pulled from the uninitiated the hard earned dollars. And some of them did not bother even with a game but actually snatched money from the hands of visitors. At night several fights occurred between the toughs and citizens in which several showmen got badly used up. It was reported that one showman got fatally injured but nothing definite is known here about his condition."

The *Progress* of nearby Mound City picked up an inflated version of the troubles at Pleasanton reporting that, "two of the alleged (sic) Forepaugh circus men were buried in Madison the next day after they were in Pleasanton. It will be re-



membered that the show broke up in a row and considerable shooting was done. It is also learned that a young lady was struck in the back by a bullet, but fortunately it struck a steel stay in her corset and glanced off without doing any harm."

The Madison *Star* reported no deaths or burials of Forepaugh men.

Politics in 19th Century Kansas was a major excitement for the citizens but even a Republican rally scheduled for August 25 could not compete with the Forepaugh's circus at Yates Center on August 25 so the politicians wisely changed the date.

In one column the *Yates Center News* stated that, "A very large crowd attended the circus at this place last Saturday. Some alarming reports about the tough characters that were following the show had preceded them to this place and the authorities were prepared for trouble and trouble there was none."

In an adjacent column the *News* reported that, "The employees of the Forepaugh show put in their spare time at this place trying to fight out a feud between the canvas men and the 'razor-backs,' for loaders. Three of these were arrested and put in the cooler for fighting Saturday evening, but some of their friends broke the lock and they made good their escape. Sheriff Held and Fred Long arrested two of them and John Long arrested the third."

Forepaugh billed Eureka for exhibitions on August 27 but cancelled the date supposedly because of poor crops in the area. A more likely explanation would be a desire to stay ahead of the sheriff.

The last Kansas date played by Forepaugh was Osage Mission [Present day St. Paul], which replaced Eureka for the performances on August 27. Following circus day the *Osage Mission Journal* reported that "Monday was a gala day for our city. It was only equalled in numbers of people in town by the 4th of July celebration. The attraction Monday was Forepaugh's great circus. They gave the best show of the kind that has been in our city for twenty years. The whole country for ten and fifteen miles around seemed to be here."

Another story in the *Journal* related the reprehensible conduct of Forepaugh's short change artists: "A number of our citizens tried to buck the various gambling games presented to them by the hangers-on of the circus on Monday all lost, so far as we have heard, in sums ranging from \$10 to \$100. We have heard of a number of cases where others lost considerable money in making change. There seemed

This ad appeared in the *Leavenworth Standard* on July 24, 1984. Kansas State Historical Society.

## THE ONLY ADAM FOREPAUGH



### MENAGERIE, CIRCUS, HIPPODROME, WILD WEST —AND— TRAINED ANIMAL SHOW.

LEAVENWORTH, SATURDAY, JULY 28.  
AFTERNOON AND NIGHT.

Many new foreign features never before seen in this country.

THE BEST SHOW ON EARTH,  
BAR NONE!

The only show in the world that has

A HORSE THAT WALKS A  
TIGHT ROPE.

A BABY ELEPHANT,  
36 inches high.

A TALKING HORSE.

The only show in the world that has  
a COMPLETE MENAGERIE of rare  
and foreign animals.

A herd of

TRAINED ELEPHANTS,  
performed by the

KING OF ALL ANIMAL TRAINERS,  
ADAM FOREPAUGH.

A full

COMPLETE ROMAN HIPPODROME.

A genuine and perfect representation  
of the

SPORTS AND PASTIME OF THE  
WILD WEST.

The artists have been selected principally from the

ROYAL CIRCUS COMPANIES

Of the world, forming an aggregation unsurpassed. Want of space precludes the possibility of naming many novelties.

The grand parade with OPEN ANIMAL DENS on the street where they can be seen free to all. Should largely attract the little ones.

DON'T FAIL TO SEE IT.

Doors open 1 and 7 p. m., circus one hour later.

to be a large business carried on in this manner; one dollar bills were given for fives. This was bare-faced robbery and the parties should have been arrested on the spot, but we have heard of no arrests. Our own relations with the circus managers was pleasant and we were never treated more courteously and honorable (sic)."

"Editors never get caught in any of these games probably because they never have any surplus money or 'change.' we are sorry indeed for those of our people who got swindled on Monday, and hope it will not only be a lesson to them but to all others in future not to have anything whatever to do with these traveling fakirs."

Apparently, Forepaugh had planned an extensive tour west of Yates Center but the plans were scrapped. Conway Springs 110 miles west of Yates Center as the crow flies was advertised for August 28. The date was cancelled and the Conway Springs *Star* was miffed.

The managers of the Forepaugh circus informed the railroad officials here last Saturday that they had cancelled all dates at all towns in Kansas west of Yates Center, and would not show at Conway Springs as advertised. No reason was given for the fool act, and we suppose nobody regrets very much that the show is not coming—but we regret that we advertised it so thoroughly as a 'sure thing.' Of course the advertising was furnished by the show's agents and we hold 'orders' on the treasurer for pay for the same whether we ever get anything for the orders or not.

"THE STAR likes to be always reliable, but occasionally we get left like anybody else.

"So we will have no circus after all. Dernit anyhow."

After Osage Mission the show entered Missouri, hotly pursued by Bandmaster George Coupe.

The Only Adam Forepaugh Menagerie, Circus, Hippodrome, Wild West and Trained Animal Show, in 1894 exhibited in these Kansas towns: July 28, Leavenworth; July 31, Hiawatha; August 1, Frankfort; August 2, Washington; August 3, Beloit; August 9, Belleville; August 13, Sabetha; August 14, Horton; August 15, Holton; August 16, Alma; August 17, Herrington; August 18, Osage City; August 20, Osawatomie; August 21, Garnett; August 22, Pleasanton; August 23, Madison; August 24, Iola; August 25, Yates Center; August 27, Eureka (Cancelled); August 27, Osage Mission; August 28, Conway Springs (Cancelled).

Research funded in part by grants from Wolf's Camera & Video, Inc. Topeka, Kansas.



#### HERE WE ARE AGAIN!

In honor of the celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the birth of the American Circus, we have arranged for the re-publication of:

ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN CIRCUS VOLUME I  
1793-1829  
by Stuart Thayer

First published in 1976 and long out of print, this new edition (with some corrections and additions) is still the most comprehensive history of the first thirty-seven years of the American circus ever published.

The pioneers of the ring, John Bill Ricketts, Victor Pepin, Jean Breschard, Philip Lailson and their troupes, their programs and their travels appear here as do the early American proprietors Nathan Howes, Aaron Turner, Price & Simpson, J. Purdy Brown and all the others.

If the beginnings of the tented circus, the movements of the circus into the West, the fires and fights and triumphs of the early companies interest you, then this is the book in which to read about them.

Paperbound, 5" x 8", 8 illustrations, 240 pages. \$30 (postpaid) from the author.

Stuart Thayer  
430 17th Avenue East  
Seattle, WA 98112  
Edition limited to 250 copies.

## MAIL AUCTION OF THE TOM PARKINSON ROUTE BOOK COLLECTION

This is the largest collection of route books offered at one time in over a decade. Included are many rare volumes dating back to the 1890s.

For a list and bidding instruction send SASE to:

Fred D. Pfening III  
1075 W. Fifth Ave.  
Columbus, Ohio 43212

# CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

DALE C. HAYNES  
CHS SECRETARY-TREASURER

GREETINGS OF THE SEASON



## **\$600.00 REWARD**

Wanted anything pertaining to the Fred Buchanan Circuses of Granger, Iowa.

### **TITLES USED**

**YANKEE ROBINSON 1906-1920**  
**WORLD BROS. 1923**  
**ROBBINS BROS. 1924-31**

I will pay \$600 to locate and use a photo of circus train parked on siding at the Granger quarters. All letters answered.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS  
and HAPPY NEW YEAR**

Joseph S. Rettinger  
Director Division 7  
Circus Historical Society  
P. O. Box 20371  
Phoenix, Ariz. 85036



**PEACE ON EARTH  
GOODWILL TOWARD MEN**

A traditional Christmas refrain that perhaps someday we can live by year around. Wishing all of you Joy, Good Health and Peace in 1995.

2928 East Octillo Rd.  
Queen Creek, AZ 85242

**HOLIDAY  
GREETINGS**  
**CIRCUS REPORT**

Don Marcks  
Publisher  
525 Oak St.  
El Cerrito, CA 94530-3699

*God's Blessings  
Christmas,  
and in  
1995*

**HANK  
FRASER**

*Over fifty years around  
CIRCUSDOM*

HENRY H. FRASER LIMITED

*Kenneth Feld presents*  
**SIEGFRIED & ROY**  
**AT THE MIRAGE**



A MERRY CHRISTMAS &  
A JOYOUS NEW YEAR!

MAGICIALLY YOURS,

*Siegfried & Roy*



*Mike Martin's*  
**CIRCUS HOBBY HALL**



# Great Gifts and Stocking Stuffers

## CIRCUS PROGRAM PACKAGES

### PACKAGE # ONE:

9 photo filled editions from 4 popular modern day shows  
 HILL'S GREAT AMERICAN: 1990 & 1992  
 CARSON & BARNES: 1985, 1988 & 1991  
 KELLY-MILLER: 1987, 1988 & 1990  
 FRANZEN BROS.: 1990  
 ALL 9 PROGRAMS FOR \$18.50 POSTPAID

### PACKAGE # TWO:

CIRCUS VARGAS - 7 photo loaded editions from the show's earlier heyday as "America's 3-ring Giant". 1975, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1988 and 1989  
 7 MINT PROGRAMS \$18.50 POSTPAID

## EXCLUSIVELY FROM CIRCUS HOBBY HALL



Gorgeous, full color half sheets from this highly acclaimed show are available for the first time, to collectors and fans! We have a limited supply of these glossy, multicolored prints in mint condition, sent rolled

\$18.50 EACH POSTPAID



## COLLECTOR PACKAGE

contains one each for the following scarce items:

1953 PRESS PASS CARD  
 1954 SEASON PASS CARD (VERY ORNATE)  
 1955 RESERVED SEAT TICKET  
 1968 EMPLOYEE PASS CARD  
 1960 MERLE EVANS' RBB&B BUS. CARD  
 1970 100th ANNIVERSARY PRESS CARD  
 ALL MINT ITEMS PER PKG. \$ 5.50 POSTPAID

## "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA VOL. #4"

Take a colorful trip back to the show lots of the 40's and 50's. See Kelly-Miller, Cristiani, Mills and Clyde Beatty. Plus rail shows of Cole and Dailey Bros. and rare footage of Hagenbeck-Wallace & Downie in the 30's.

EACH 2 HOUR VIDEO \$29.50 POSTPAID

## CIRCUS AUDIO TAPES

1). "CIRCUS IN TOWN"	DECCA
2). "CIRCUS TIME"	DECCA
3). "RBB&B CIRCUS BAND"	CAPITOL
4). "MUSIC FROM THE BIG TOP"	EVEREST
5). "CIRCUS SPECTACULAR"	LONDON
6). "MERLE & R/B BAND"	RCA 1931
7). "MERLE & R/B BAND"	COLUMBIA 1941
8). "SINGING RINGMASTER"	(HAROLD RONK)

"1943 FITCH BANDWAGON" - Merle Evans and the RB band are featured with Fred Bradna & Bev Kelley on this radio broadcast. Plus interviews with RB performers: Unus, Francis Brunn and other surprises!

MERLE EVANS CONCERT DATE - 1968 Live Chicago concert with band made up of some of the finest circus bandsmen in the country. Contains numbers not usually recorded but that were favorites of Merle's. Lively & fun concert!

SINGLE TAPES - \$10.50 POSTPAID

ALL ORDERS IN THE CONTINENTAL U.S AND CANADA ARE POSTPAID. HAWAII AND THE REST OF THE WORLD, PLEASE ADD \$4.00 PER ITEM ORDERED.

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:**

**MIKE MARTIN**

Dept. BW - 16840 S.W. 62 St.  
 Ft. Lauderdale, Fl 33331  
 Fla. residents add 6% Sales tax

KENNETH FELD  
PRESENTS

# RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS

THE  
GREATEST  
SHOW  
ON  
EARTH



CELEBRATING 125 YEARS  
OF THE BEST  
IN FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT!

*Holiday Greetings*  
from  
**THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH!®**